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BROADWAY BILLY'S BIG BULGE



TICKET'S LITTLE SCHEME HAD WORKED. HE WAS WHERE HE COULD HEAR ALL THE CONSPIRATORS MIGHT SAY.

OR,
Running In the Life Insurance
Conspirators.

BY J. C. COWDRICK,
AUTHOR OF "BROADWAY BILLY" NOVELS, ETC.

CHAPTER I.

WHAT BROADWAY BILLY WITNESSED.
It was about as fierce a night as New York
had ever seen.

Two thunderstorms, coming up from different
directions, had met directly over the city, and
were there engaged in a battle that seemed al-
most like the crashing of worlds.

Fierce, forked tongues of fire darted out from the inky clouds this way and that, with scarcely a moment's cessation, as though the avenging angels had come to destroy the mighty city; and blue serpents of electrical flame were running along on the ground to the terror of all who were abroad.

Nor was this the worst. Suddenly came a burst of wind that seemed determined to level everything in its course. Signs, poles, wires—everything of lighter nature—were tossed about like toys; while passengers on foot were blown to the ground before they could get under shelter. Tops were torn from carriages, and in some cases the street cars were overturned.

But, no sooner had the destruction been wrought and desolation, almost, left in the track of the speeding cyclone, than a new danger, more terrible than all the rest, was realized. The hundreds of "live" electric wires were all down, and were dealing death in every direction without discrimination, to man and beast alike. A single touch, and a horse fell lifeless as surely as though struck by a bolt out of the very heavens.

It was awful—awful in the strongest sense of the word.

On this night Detective William Weston—Broadway Billy—hero of a hundred adventures, was abroad, and it happened that he was in that part of the city where the storm and havoc were worst experienced.

He had been braving it all, homeward bound, till he discovered the cyclone almost upon him, when he sprang to the shelter of a deep doorway just in time to escape its embrace; but even there he had to cling closely in order not to be drawn out by the powerful suction.

The cyclone having passed, the natural wind of the storm seemed like a calm in comparison, and Billy looked out from his place of shelter upon the terrible scene of which attempted description has been offered. He had faced dangers many, but this was something to chill the stoutest heart. Here was a force unseen, more deadly than the fire of cannon.

Men were running this way and that, terror-crazed, while horses were screaming and plunging in a way to add to the confusion. The storm was at its height, and now in the absence of the electric lights, the lightning seemed tenfold increased.

Several horses were down, and quite a number of men, two or three of whom were dead, beyond question.

While Billy looked, something happened more terrible still.

He noted a man coming up the street, walking almost leisurely, as though himself were king of the elements—a man of ordinary build, without anything striking in his appearance, unless it was his intensely black beard, thick any heavy; one who would attract no more attention in a crowd than any one of a hundred other ordinary men.

But, the fact that he walked here so calmly, in the very face of death as it were, struck Broadway Billy as peculiar, to say the least, when other men were running and scrambling for very life. He could not help looking at him; and while he looked a change came over the man.

From walking he sprang suddenly into a run, leaving the sidewalk and darting out into the street.

Naturally, Billy's eyes left him for a second to learn what was the object of his sudden change and his chase, and they rested upon a younger man who was carefully picking his way amidst the awful confusion.

Billy's first thought was that the two men were friends, and that the stranger of the beard was running to join the other, but he was speedily and terribly undeceived. He of the beard stooped suddenly, caught up one of the writhing, hissing wires, and leaping forward, thrust its spark-tipped end against the back of the young man's head.

Broadway Billy was struck with horror at the assassin act.

The man dropped instantly to the ground, lifeless, while the stranger, dropping the wire, started to run from the scene of his heinous deed.

But, Billy Weston was after him immediately, regardless of all danger, determined that the murderer should not escape if it lay in his power to detain him. And he might have been successful but for an accident to himself.

Billy picked his way with all the care possible in his haste, but, as it proved, not carefully enough. His foot or his leg came into brushing contact with one of the wires, and the chase was done. Billy realized a painfully bright flash, and knew no more until he came to, hours later.

It was daylight when consciousness returned to the brave young detective, and as he came back to the world his mind took up the thread of life just where it had been so suddenly severed.

The murderer was just ahead of him, in another moment he would be up with him, and then would be seen which was the better man—But—how was this? Here he was on his back on a hospital cot! He remembered the flash; the rest was easily guessed, for his head was clear.

He called a nurse to his side.

"How long have I been here, miss?" he asked.

"Since last night, sir," the answer. "The lightning came near killing you, sir."

"I guess it did. But, I feel all right, or nearly so, and must be going. Can you report me all right and have my clothes brought?"

"I'll do what I can for you, sir. You'll have to wait till the doctor has seen you, though. Are you quite sure you are able to get up? Maybe you are hurt worse than you think."

The nurse was young and winning, and Billy being an exceptionally fine-looking young fellow she seemed nothing loth to talk with him.

"Yes, I'm sure of it," Billy assured. "There's a little lightness about the head, but that is nothing; I'll be myself again in ten minutes, once I get up and out. You just report me all right, and I won't forget I owe you an obligation. I'm anxious to be going."

She responded, promising again, and went on her way, to soon return, guiding one of the staff of doctors to Billy's cot.

"Think you're well, do you, young man?" the doctor greeted.

"I'm pretty sure of it, sir," Billy promptly answered. "You can't discharge me any too soon."

"Well, we'll see about it."

Pulse and temperature were noted, and finally the doctor agreed with Billy that he was all right, gave his discharge, and ordered his clothes brought.

As soon as Billy was dressed he sought out the nurse with whom he had struck up such agreeable acquaintance.

"How many more victims of the lightning were brought here last night?" he made inquiry, not idly but with a definite purpose in view.

"There were five, I believe, sir," the answer.

"Are they here in this ward?"

"Yes, sir."

"Will you point them out to me, so that I may see them?"

"Why, certainly, sir. Are you looking for some friend among them? This is one, sir."

"I'm looking for a man I saw fall just before my own light went out," Billy explained. "This one is not he; I would know him at a glance."

All the five were pointed out, but the young man whom he had seen so treacherous-

ly dropped by the man of the whiskers was not among them, and Billy had no doubt but he had been instantly killed.

On leaving the hospital his first care was to let his mother and the boys know he was alive and well; that done he set about learning what he could about the victims of the awful storm and wind—or more accurately, of the death-dealing wires.

Finally he found the victim, in one of the deadhouses, recognizing the body instantly, for he had had a good look at the face of the young man.

His search thus rewarded, he instituted inquiries concerning the man, asking:

"Is it known who this man was?"

"From letters and papers in his pockets his name is suppose to have been Charles Pleyton."

"Any address?"

"Yes," giving it.

"Has notice been sent there?"

"Yes; and to other addresses as well."

"But no one has been to claim the body yet, I take it?"

"No one; but, then, it's early, and plenty of time for that. He'll be claimed, never fear."

"Do you know what was the cause of death?"

"The lightning last night, sir."

"Where did it touch him?"

"Are you a reporter?"

"No; I'm a detective," Billy answered, showing his badge.

"Oh!" and immediately he received a different manner of treatment. "Then it is crime you are on the scent of?"

"Perhaps."

"Well, the only mark on the body is a burn at the base of the brain. I have no doubt death came quicker than a wink the instant he was touched."

"That is enough," Billy declared. "I am now sure of the man's identity beyond doubt. Have you noticed a man with black whiskers paying any attention to this body?"

"No, sir."

"Very good. Well, my business is right here till I can send for one of my boys to take my place—"

"You're not Broadway Billy?"

"Nobody else, friend. I'll send for Happy Harry and Silent Seth, or one of them, and try to work up a little mystery that came under my notice last night while the storm was raging."

Billy sent a messenger to his office for his beagles, and pending their arrival Billy kept watch over the body of the murdered man, to pick up a clue, if possible, through some one who might show interest.

No one gave it more than passing notice, however, and up to the time when Happy Harry and Silent Seth put in their appearance no one had come to claim it, and Billy turned the charge over to the boys.

There was a chance, though a small one, that he might by this means get on track of the man with the black whiskers, and it was a means not to be slighted, since it was the only opening he had at present. So, leaving Harry and the Silent Shadower on guard, Billy sought his office.

CHAPTER II.

LOOKS LIKE A PLAIN CASE.

WHEN the young prince of detectives reached his office he glanced at the bulletin as he unlocked the door.

There was something written by Seth to the effect that the office might be open in about an hour, and under that a communication from some prospective clients, as Billy guessed.

It was this:

"MR. WESTON:—

"Have called to see you. Will return in an hour. If you come in before that time, please wait. Important. Two."

"It looks like a case of some sort climbing the horizon," Billy said to himself. "I'll wait, of course, and see what *Two* want of me. Man's writing and it has the twist of a business hand."

As much of the hour had already passed, Billy had not long to wait before the "Two" arrived, for soon the door opened and two men came into the office.

One of these was a person of middle age, while the other was younger, about thirty-one or two, perhaps.

"Mr. Weston?" the elder asked.

"Yes, sir."

"You saw our notice on the board, of course?"

"Yes; and waited as you requested. What is your pleasure with me, if I may inquire?"

"There's no pleasure about it, sir, but business—straight business. My name, sir, is Aaron Buckley, and this is my friend, John Edwards. We have come to consult with you."

"Very well, gentlemen, you have my attention."

"All right, then I'll proceed. You see, sir, the matter is just this: Ten of us mutually insured our lives, in a purely business way, and now three of the ten have recently died and we are not altogether satisfied that they came to their end in a purely natural manner."

"You suspect there has been foul play, then?"

"That's it, that's it exactly," said Mr. Buckley.

"Give me the facts and all the points you can."

"Well, we insured, as I said, mutually, in the interest of all. If one died, his insurance was to be divided among his survivors, and so on to the end, when the last man would come in for the bulk."

"How do I understand you?"

"Don't I make it plain?"

"Does this money accumulate in a fund till the last man heirs it all, upon the death of the last of the other nine?"

"Not in just that way, but each member is pledged to deposit one-half of his benefits in a common fund for the interest of all, out of which the insurance premiums are to be paid."

"And the last man of all gets this fund?"

"Now you have it, sir. Quite a neat sum, you see. He gets thirty thousand straight—that is the sum each is insured for, and the accumulated fund, which on the death of Number Nine would amount to about one hundred and thirty-five thousand dollars."

"Less the premiums."

"Yes; say a hundred and fifty thousand in all, in round numbers."

"That is quite a sum of money; but, you do not imagine one of your own number is bent upon killing the other nine, do you?"

"We don't know; that is what we want you to investigate. If everything is all right, that is all there is about it; if not, then we want to be protected. We do not care to be murdered."

"No man would, naturally. Just give me a list of these ten, if you please, with the addresses of all."

"We are only seven now, you understand."

"No matter, give me the full score."

"Very well. Myself and Edwards here are two, and then there were Smith, Ditmer and Diamond, who are now dead. The others living are Morris Clark, Thomas Pinney, Francis Myers, Isaac Whitaker and Charles Pleyton."

"Charles Pleyton?"

"Yes; do you know him?"

"Describe him, if you please."

"Young man, about thirty-one, rather good-looking with light mustache."

"The same man. Are you aware that he, too, is dead?"

"What?"

"Dead!"

"A man of that name, one answering well to the description you have just given me, was killed last night in the storm by an electric wire. His body is now at the morgue where it is held for his family to claim."

"This is horrible! There can be no suspicion of foul play in this case, of course."

"It would not look reasonable, that is true. Quite a number came to their death last night, you are aware. It was the worst experience New York has ever had, I am sure."

Billy was not going to show his hand—that is, was not going to tell these men at this time what he knew.

For aught he could tell, it might be a case of the fox playing finder.

One of these men might be the rascal.

"Poor Pleyton!" said the younger man. "If it is indeed our Charles Pleyton, we are now only six, Mr. Buckley."

"You are right. It is quite a cutting off, and all within a couple of months at that."

"There is room for a mistake, of course," Billy remarked. "This Pleyton may not be yours, although the description fits. But, tell me about the insurance matter."

"Guess you have about all there is to tell, sir."

"Oh, no; you have not told me *why* you suspect foul play, or whom you suspect. If I am to be of any use to you I must know everything you can tell me."

"Well, the first reason for our suspecting was this: Bernard Smith, George Ditmer and James Diamond were all strong and healthy men, and it was a little peculiar that they should go off suddenly like they did."

"Of what did they die?"

"It was called heart failure, but in the case of Diamond, who died last, the insurance people began to suspect that all was not right, and they made a thorough investigation."

"With what result?"

"No result, and they paid the money. They looked for poison, but there was not a trace. They could prove no foul play, and so paid the claim. We invited the fullest investigation, to a man, and gave them every assistance in our power. Nothing suspicious was brought to light."

"And yet you were not satisfied that all was right."

"No; and for that reason we want you to look into the matter a little, in a quiet way."

"Whom do you suspect?"

"Now you strike upon a delicate point, Mr. Weston. To mention a name might be to wrong an innocent man. If we do mention a name you must pledge yourself to us not to reveal it unless you get proof to support the suspicion."

"I can readily promise that."

"Well, then, if we do suspect any one it is Morris Clark."

"One of your ten?"

"Yes."

"Describe him to me."

"Oh, he is an ordinary looking man, wearing a full black beard. This beard is his most striking feature. He's about forty years old, I should say—in fact I know."

Broadway Billy's face betrayed nothing of what he thought.

This description fitted well the man whom he had seen slay Pleyton on the previous night.

It looked as though fortune was going to place the matter in his hands at the start, so there would be little work in hunting down the murderer, after all.

"And his address?" Billy questioned. "Also the addresses of all. I must be armed and equipped, you know."

These were promptly furnished.

"The man Pleyton was certainly of your little company," the detective then assured. "This same address was found on his person. I hardly thought there was room for a mistake."

"Poor Charlie!" sighed Edwards. "He was a noble fellow."

"Had he any foes?" Billy asked.

"Not that I know of."

"On what terms were he and this man Clark?"

"The best of terms," assured Mr. Buckley. "They were good friends. In fact, our whole ten were good friends."

"What led you to suspect Clark?"

"His manner. He has not been himself since our first member died. Am I not right, John?"

"You are right, Mr. Buckley."

"Yes; you see, John and I have talked the whole matter over between ourselves, and we have both noticed that Clark has not been acting right. We have spoken to none of the others yet."

"That is all the better; do not do so, but keep it to yourselves. It will be better so. What seems to be the difference in the man's manner?"

"He is reserved, watchful, and acts as though guilty of something or afraid of something."

"What is his business?"

"He is something of a scientist, I believe; writes scientific articles now and then; has a little fortune at his back."

"Anything to do with electricity?"

"Yes, he has written something about that. Says he is a student in that line, I believe."

Broadway Billy saw a plain case, or—thought he did.

No one but a man full of the confidence knowledge gives would have dared to pick up the live wire as he had seen the man of the whiskers do on the previous night, murder his object.

The two men remained a considerable time in the office, Billy gleaning every point possible from them, and when they had taken their leave the young detective was certain they were innocent of any crooked work in the matter they had brought to him. He had put them far enough to the test to satisfy himself on that point.

CHAPTER III.

BEGINNING THE BUSINESS.

WHILE Billy was thinking over the matter, after the men had gone, Happy Harry and Silent Seth came in.

Harry had his usual smile, while Seth's face was as imperturbable as ever, expressing nothing, neither victory nor defeat.

Billy always took Harry's face for his index, or thermometer, and could read in it almost exactly to what extent success or failure had been met with.

"Well, you have been successful, anyhow," Billy promptly observed, as they entered.

"Bet your boots on it!" admitted Harry.

"Well?"

"As usual, thank you!"

Harry was ripe for his nonsense, but Seth took it up.

"Parties came for the body," he explained, "and we followed. They took it to the address where he was supposed to live, and we found they were his relations. Did not see any black-whiskered man."

"Who were they who came for the body?"

"A brother, sister, and brother-in-law of the dead man. A private undertaker took charge."

"That's it," chipped in Harry. "That's what I was going to explain—when I got around to it. Seth, you are too brief; you

ought to draw out the agony more. I would, you bet!"

"There is generally too much drawing about you, Harry, and that's where Seth often gets in his work ahead of you. Still, as a team you are perfect, so I have nothing to complain of. Sit down, now, and let me give you the points of a case I have taken hold of."

Billy having told the boys nothing about the murder, did so now, relating all the incidents of the storm and what had followed.

"Christopher Columbia!" cried Harry. "Who says there's nothing new under the sun? That's enough to make a feller's flesh creep, skin me alive if it isn't!"

Silent Seth's face was as innocent of change of expression as ever: nothing ever disturbed his equanimity when on duty or talking "business."

"Ain't it, Seth?" Harry sharply appealed.

"It's certainly new and terrible enough," Seth agreed with him.

"There's another chapter to be told, though," Billy now added, "and I want you to pay strict attention, and keep in your heads every name and address I give you."

With that he told about the insurance scheme, and the suspicion against the man Clark.

"Why, it's a plain case!" cried Harry, at once. "His Whiskers is the man, and it's crackers to cheese we'll nab him, too, easy enough."

"Don't be too sure," said Seth.

"Hal! do you think differently?" asked Billy.

"Well, there's one thing a little strange about it, if he is the man."

"What is that?"

"Why, just this: If he killed Smith, Ditmer and Diamond so scientifically that it could not be discovered, why would he deal so differently with Pleyton? But, I know you'll explain that, of course."

"Explain it yourself, then."

"Well, you would say he saw the excellent opportunity and the thought came to him to dispose of another of the nine and so reduce the score, and at the same time in such a way that the insurance company could not question the matter of the claim."

"You have shown up both sides in a strong light," commented Billy, "and I am of the opinion the weight is with the latter inference—that is, that Clark is the man, and that he seized a favorable opportunity, as you say. Still, there is another thing to look at, which is, that he had to run the danger of being seen and recognized in the act."

"He took the chances."

"And you both think Clark murdered Pleyton?"

"Crackers an' cheese, yes!" asserted Harry. "Let's go and gobble him in."

"Not quite so fast," Billy demurred. "I have got to see the man first and identify him. Here is work enough for us all, for a time at least."

"Map it out for us, then."

"Well, I am going first to the house of the Pleytons, to see them, and then to Police Headquarters, and while I am thus engaged you may be shadowing Clark, if you can get on his track, and learn what kind of a man he is and where he puts in his time. We will meet here after dinner."

Billy set forth at once for the Pleyton residence.

When his summons at the door was answered he asked to see Mr. Pleyton, or his sister, having received his knowledge of the household from Harry and Seth.

He was admitted, and presently a man came to him in the reception-room.

"Mr. Pleyton?" asked Billy.

"Yes, sir."

"You are brother to Charles Pleyton who was killed last night?"

"I am."

"Well, I have called to ask permission to see the dead man, and especially to examine the place where the lightning touched him."

"Who are you, sir?"

"I am William Weston, a private detective."

"A detective? Is this not something out of the usual? What is your object, if I may inquire?"

"I suspect something more than lightning, in this case, Mr. Pleyton. You have the right to demand my reason, and I ought not refuse the demand."

"Good heavens! what do you suspect?"

"Murder!"

"My God! It cannot be possible. Who do you imagine killed him?"

"That is more than I can answer at this time. Nor am I prepared to enlighten you any further at present."

"Well, you are welcome to see the body, Mr. Weston. Anything we can do to aid you will be done cheerfully. If there is anything so terrible as you suspect, it must be cleared away."

"Yes, it must be ferreted out and the murderer punished. Do you know whether Charles had any foe who could be guilty of so great a crime?"

"I am not aware that he had any such foe, sir."

"Well, let me see the body."

"You are none to soon, for the undertaker is preparing to place it in a casket even now."

They repaired to another room, where an undertaker was at his unpleasant duties of preparing a fellow creature for the tomb.

"This gentleman wants to see the body," Pleyton made known.

The undertaker stopped, looking up.

"All right, sir," he said.

"There is a burn on the back of the neck, I believe," said Billy.

"Yes, sir."

"I want to see that."

It was easily shown—a round, ragged, hideous-looking spot where the flesh had been burned as with a white-hot iron.

"No other mark on the body," Billy spoke.

"Not another scratch, sir."

"Isn't it strange that a wire should have touched him in such a place?"

"Well, now, that is just what I have been thinking myself, sir," the response. "And it must have been the end of a wire, too."

"That shows for itself. Now if it had been on a hand, or if the side of the wire had crossed his neck, it would not have so strange; but as it is I fail to understand it."

"Looks more as if some one had taken the wire and touched him purposely," the undertaker suggested.

"If one could imagine anything so horrible," Billy rejoined.

With that he and Mr. Pleyton withdrew from the room, returning to the other apartment to conclude their interview.

"What do you think of the undertaker's suggestion?" Billy asked.

"Too horrible to be entertained for a moment," the response.

"But you heard him say there is no other mark on the body."

"And that is true."

"And I have told you I suspect something more than accident in the case. That I suspect murder."

"Then you go so far as to agree with the undertaker in the heinous suggestion he let fall? Mr. Weston, it is out of reason. Who could do so hellish a deed as that?"

"Murder is a hellish thing anyhow, Mr. Pleyton, and if a man was bent upon doing such a deed where would he get a weapon so effectual?"

"That is so; but—"

"See here, Mr. Pleyton: Suppose it is so, you would naturally want the murderer hunted down and brought to justice."

"Mr. Weston, if Charles was murdered, as you seem to think—though I fail to understand *why* you should think so—his murderer *must* be found. I would lay out every dollar I possess to bring him to the death-chair."

"And you stand ready to aid me in hunting him down?"

"I do. But, how do you know this?"

"Because, I *saw* the terrible act committed!"

"Saw it? You *saw* Charles murdered!"

"I did; I saw a man take up an electric light wire and touch him with it."

"Great heavens! Is it possible! Who was that man, Mr. Weston? Only let me hear his name, and I'll—"

"That is what we must discover—"

"But, you would know him again, would you not?"

"I think I would, but might not be able to swear to his identity. Now, this must be kept as quiet as possible, profoundly so, at present."

"And how am I to help you?"

"In this way: You must advertise for persons who witnessed the storm at the place where your brother was killed, and try to discover some other witness. There may have been others besides me. Anyhow, it may stir up the murderer to taking measures for his own safety, and by so doing he will lay himself open to attack."

CHAPTER IV.

PLANTING THE SUSPICION.

FREDERICK PLEYTON rubbed his chin in a thoughtful manner.

He was a man of dark hair and beardless face, with heavy brows and penetrating black eyes.

A little younger than his brother, the two had looked but very slightly alike, the greatest difference being in the fact that one was light while the other was decidedly dark.

It was some minutes before the man made response to Billy's remark.

Presently he said:

"Your plan looks feasible; but, what excuse is to be offered for advertising? If persons answer, am I to say—My brother was murdered?"

"Well, no, that would hardly do; it might have the wrong effect and bring about no good result. Some excuse must be framed, of course. Your brother's life was insured, I believe?"

"Yes."

"You might say you want to find some one who saw the accident, in order to present it to the insurance company in case any doubt is raised."

"Would not that work more harm than good? It is well enough known where and how he was killed—that is, the case was plain enough till you told me what you saw; now it is terribly different."

"The very thing we would want, I should think," Billy insisted. "It ought to be the more satisfactory to the insurance people, to see you earnest to learn the exact manner of your brother's death, and if it awakens in them any suspicion the murderer will have to be all the more wary."

"Well, you ought to know better than I; if you direct me to follow that course in the matter, I'll do so."

"I think it's the best plan we can adopt."

"All right. I'm willing, as I said, to do anything to bring the wretch to justice. I'll do whatever you say, for I am sure you ought to know what is for the best, Mr. Weston."

"If you do that I think we'll be able to ferret the matter out and catch our man. It was the most dastardly deed I ever witnessed, and I have fully made up my mind to

bring the rascal to account. Had your brother any acquaintance who wore a heavy and full black beard?"

Pleyton thought.

"I cannot recall such a man," he answered. "Is that a description of the man who killed him?"

"Yes; a man of the average build, with a full and thick black beard. I have told you all about his coolness in the storm, as though it was something of which he was master."

"Impossible to imagine who it can have been. He may have mistaken Charles for some one else."

"That is possible, but not probable."

"Or, maybe he was crazy."

"I can't agree with you in that. He was too cool about it for a crazy man. At present, then, you can suggest no one whom we may suspect of having done the deed? You can think of no man of that description?"

"Neither. I am all at loss."

Billy said nothing about the other matter, the insurance scheme, here, nor did Pleyton mention it to him, even did he know about it.

Billy could not be certain on that point, and did not deem it important anyhow. Since he, Pleyton, could not help him any toward finding a clue to the man of the black beard, Billy would not post him regarding the suspicion against Clark.

Their conversation was at greater length than we have quoted, its drift being all we are interested to know; and finally Billy took his departure. He had gained little, but had made known to the family the fact that Charles Pleyton's death had not been by accident.

From there the young detective prince went to Police Headquarters.

He was cordially greeted, as ever, and sat down for a chat, telling about his experience in the terrible storm.

"Would you know that man if you saw him again?" the superintendent asked.

"I think I would," Billy answered, "but it might be hard to swear to his identity if called on to do that."

"And that is where you are in a fix, my boy. If your suspicion falls on any one you will have to put yourself down to your finest work to bring the crime home to him."

"I realize it, sir; the fact that I witnessed it will really count for very little."

"That's the way it is, Billy. You might be sure of the man, in your own mind, but you have got to *prove* him the murderer or your own testimony will not carry very far."

"Well, I'm going to have the fellow if it is possible to get him. Only for my happening to witness the crime, Charles Pleyton's death would be laid to the account of the storm, and no one would ever suspect the truth. I thought I'd tell you about it and see if you could give me any advice."

"As to that, I don't think I can suggest anything that would not naturally occur to you, my boy. I shall call you my boy, you see. Of course you will have to look into Pleyton's life and see who benefits most by his death. If you discover your man of the black whiskers in this connection, that will be a big step."

"I am glad to find my ideas are supported by you, sir," Billy modestly observed. "I'll let you know how the case comes out."

Billy mentioned nothing about the insurance matter, even here. He had his reasons. He wanted to work that quietly; then, too, he was pledged not to reveal the name of Morris Clark in this connection until he had found proof against him. If he could get that, then he would be free to attack. He had reason to believe he had entered upon a difficult case.

He had learned from Mr. Buckley the name of the insurance company in which the ten men had mutually insured, and from

Police Headquarters went to the company's office.

There he asked for an interview with some officer of the company.

Such a person was on hand, one of the leading men of the concern, and Billy was shown into his private office.

"A detective, eh?" the officer greeted him as he entered.

"Yes, sir," Billy civilly answered. "I have called on a matter of business, sir."

"Very well, sit down and we'll have it out. I have heard your name before, if I mistake not. Let me see; you are called—"

"Broadway Billy."

"That's it; glad to make your acquaintance. You have been working yourself into quite a reputation. But, I'm hindering what you have to say. Make known your business, Mr. Weston."

"Some time ago your detectives were investigating the death of a Mr. James Diamond, of this city."

"I'll accept your statement for it; we have so much of this sort of work going on that it is not easy to call up any particular case off-hand, unless there was something striking in connection with it."

"There was something of that sort in this case."

"Ah! then I may be able to recall it."

"This man Diamond was one of ten who were insured in a sort of mutual benefit clique, and he was the third to die within a short time."

"Ha! yes; now I recall the circumstances. What about it?"

"You paid the claim, I believe."

"We did, sir."

"Proof that you found nothing crooked in the matter. You suspected fraud, but failed to establish it."

"Exactly."

"Are you aware that a fourth man of that ten is now dead?"

"Zounds! no; had not heard of it. Four within two months! This is getting a little too strong—ay, a good deal too strong."

"But, on the face of it, this case looks all right. The man was killed by an electric wire during the storm last night. There were several killed in that way, you know."

"Yes; and I expected we would have a claim or two presented; but, to think it should be one of that ten!"

"I have not call merely to tell you about the man's death."

"No, I can imagine not, seeing you are a detective. What is it that brought you then?"

"I suspect something more than an accident."

"Ah—ha! Suicide?"

"Murder."

"Oh—ho! But, that may not let us off, unless we can establish proof that it was done to secure the money."

"And that is your business, sir. I have a suspicion that all is not right, and have come to give you the advantage of it, if you feel disposed to accept a pointer from me."

"We'll be glad to do so, Mr. Weston, if anything is crooked. What is it you refer to?"

"There is something very striking about the manner of the man's death."

"Lightning generally is striking, young man."

The officer of the company smiled at his own little joke, and Billy pleased him by smiling too.

"Well, you'll call this a freak of lightning I tell you," he rejoined. "There is only a single spot on the man's body, and that is on the back of his head at the base of the brain."

"Lightning is also eccentric, sir."

"Yes; but this was the work of an electric wire. There is the mark of a burn with the end of a wire—the end, mind you, and it is deep and ugly; it was no mere touch. Now,

if it had been the side of the wire, or if it had been on a hand or leg; but, it was the end, and in a deadly place."

"It looks peculiar, true."

"And that is all I have to say about it, sir. The claim will come in, no doubt is in now, and it may be to your interest to investigate further before settling it. The matter is nothing to me, so far as your paying the money or not, but, seeing the thing in the light I do, I think there has been crooked work. It looks to me as if the wire was touched to the man's head purposely."

That was all Billy had to say there; he had planted the seed, and it was for the company's detectives to attend to it. Billy's object was, to have the matter stirred as much as possible, so that the murderer would be forced to be on his guard, and, with the clue he had to his identity—with the sight he had had of him, he hoped to be able to bring him down. But, all unaware of the fact, Broadway Billy had made one serious mistake, a mistake that might possibly cost him dearly.

CHAPTER V.

THE BEAGLES START THE GAME.

In the mean time Happy Harry and Silent Seth had been hustling, as they were pleased to call it.

Acting upon the instructions from their chief, when they left the office they lost no time in making their way to the neighborhood in which the suspected man was said to reside.

On the way they talked over the case—that is to say, Harry did most of the talking, as usual. Various were their speculations, but everything came around at last to the support of the suspicion against the man Clark, and they had to look at it as a plain case.

When they came to the house they guessed its character immediately.

A very small, white slip of paper pasted on one of the bricks beside the doorway branded it as a boarding or lodging-house, or both combined.

They were on the opposite side of the street, and passed the house slowly in order to "size it up" carefully, hoping a kind fortune might favor them with a sight of the man of the black whiskers.

"I take it His Whiskers is a bach," remarked Happy Harry.

The Silent Shadower gave assent by his silence. It was not necessary for him to say so in words.

But Harry would not have it that way.

"Don't you agree with me, Selina?" he demanded. "If you do, open your head and say so. I hate to see a fellow so mighty saving of breath. You'll die for want of it one of these days just the same."

"Yes, I agree."

"And just see what a lot of words you have made me waste to get that out of you. Ought to be ashamed of yourself. If I die of over-talk before my appointed time, my blood will be on your head. You see, that paster gives the house away as a hash and 'margerine dispensary."

"And see what a lot more you have wasted now," Seth called attention. "But, here comes a messenger."

"Let him come," said Harry, to that. "Wouldn't think of stopping him, would you? That would be a mean trick, Seth, and I wouldn't think it of you—Hello! he is going to that very house!"

"I thought he was getting close to his destination; he was glancing at the numbers when I spotted him first."

"You ain't asleep, Seth, that's a sure thing. Let's stop."

This they did, and watched.

The messenger-boy had sprung up the steps of the house by this time and rung the bell.

Presently the door was opened, and after a moment of parley the boy delivered his book to the person who had answered his ring, and waited.

"Message for somebody," observed Harry.

It was not necessary for Seth to respond to that, a thing both could not help seeing and knowing.

"And it's for us to find out who it was for," the rattlebox rattled on. "I move that we collar that boy when he comes away and find out all we can about the matter."

"Good idea," Seth agreed promptly. "If the message happened to be for our man Clark, we'll know whether he's in or not."

"Bull's-eye, first fire!" cried delighted Harry. "You had something to say that time, sure, my gay and festive silent partner. That was what I was getting at in my round-about fashion. You always have a way of taking a short cut across when you shoot your mouth, which isn't often."

They waited, and presently the boy received his book, when he turned and ran down the stoop.

He set out to retrace his steps the way he had come, and Harry and Seth went across the street to intercept him.

When they met, Harry stopped the lad, saying:

"Will you tell us what street this is?"

The keen-witted messenger eyed his questioner sharply.

"I guess you're only coddin'," he responded, "fer I think you know well enough what street it is. I'll tell you, though, all the same, as ye asked me civil."

And he did.

"Thanks," Harry acknowledged. "Now, will you tell us who lives in that house you just came out of? We ain't foolin' with ye; it's information we're after. You see, we don't know anybody around here."

Which was all true enough.

"I don't know who lives there," the boy answered. "It's a boardin'-house, anyhow."

"But, you had a message for somebody."

"Sure."

"Mind telling us who it was? You see, we are looking for a man, and we don't want to ring every bell on the block asking for him."

"Lost his address?"

"We've got his name, though."

An artful way of evading the question.

"I believe you're only beefin' with me."

"Don't see why you should think that; we've spoken civil enough, haven't we? I have given you a straight tip."

To this time Seth had nothing to say. He now tried his hand—rather his tongue, seeing the messenger was growing suspicious of their intentions with respect to himself.

"I'll tell you," he said. "The name of the man we are looking for is Clark. We are not trying to fool you at all."

Seth's serious face restored the lad's confidence.

"Well, you couldn't 'a' guessed closer," he declared. "That was the name of the party I brought the message for."

"Bully!" cried Harry, executing a fantastic step there and then. "Now if the first name will only fit as well, we'll be all hunk. What was the front name of this Clark of yours?"

"Tell you in one second," the messenger responded, producing his book and opening it. "Here it is—M. G. Clark."

"Much obliged," said Seth. "That's all we'll bother you for."

"You can now git," chimed in Harry, smiling.

The boy looked at them in a puzzled manner, as though in doubt whether they had been playing with him or not, and went on his way.

"He saved himself a sight of trouble, by being obliging," remarked Harry, as soon as the boy was gone. "If he hadn't been, we'd

have had to down him and get the information by force."

"The most trouble was saved us," amended Seth. "But, we got what we wanted, and luck has been all on our side. Now we'll lie low and wait for our man to put in his appearance. We'll know him by his whiskers, of course, so it won't be any trouble further."

"Quite a speech for you, Seth the Silent," praised Harry. "I'll make a talker of you yet, if you are under my care long enough. But, did the letters fit the handle of our man?"

"The first one did; boss said his name was Morris."

"That's so, that's what I was trying to grip; had it right but wasn't sure. I'm never so certain—Hello! there's somebody."

"No whiskers about him, though."

"That's so, but he's got a bit of paper in his fingers."

They referred to a man who had just come out of the house and who was walking up the street rapidly.

"I'll tell you what strikes me, though, Harry," Seth earnestly urged; "his face looked as though he had recently taken a clean shave; didn't you think so, too?"

"I'm twisted if you ain't right, now that you mention it. He did have that look, for a fact—Ha! he has torn up the note and thrown it away."

"Maybe it's Clark with a clean face."

"One of us must follow him."

"Yes, sure, and the other must gather up the paper he has just thrown away. Who knows but there may be a big clue in that? Anyhow, it may tell us whether our suspicion is correct."

"Right you are, Sethy; come along."

"Which shall pick up the pieces?"

"No matter to me, partner."

"I'll do it, then."

"And I'll keep the party in sight," said Harry. "If you find I'm on the wrong scent, keep watch here and I'll wander back again when I find it out."

"All right."

"And if he is the man, come on after us; I'll try to leave a chalk trail so you can follow."

And so they parted company, Harry speeding along after the suspect while Seth stopped to gather up the scraps of paper.

The man had torn the paper into inch bits, and there were a good many of them scattered around.

Seth worked lively, though, and soon had them all gathered up.

That done, he looked at the pieces rapidly, noting words on each, not trying to get at the sense of the message as a whole.

There were such scraps as—"is dead," "to office," "must see," "are you," "it must," "look for," "and see to," etc.; and there was a name—"Buckly."

"Quite a plenty," Seth said to himself. "This is our man, no doubt of it, and Harry is on the right track. He has shaved off his beard, and ten to one he is guilty."

The first words and the last quoted were the ones upon which Seth based the opinion thus expressed.

Putting the scraps in his pocket he set out in the direction Harry and the suspect had taken, watching the sidewalk as he advanced.

At the first corner was a chalk-mark sign, easily interpreted, indicating the way Harry and the suspect had gone; and at each corner for a long distance these signs were repeated.

Seth went at a much livelier gait than Harry and the suspect had gone; and eventually he espied his partner ahead of him.

Increasing his pace, then, he soon caught up.

"He's our mutton, then?" queried Harry.

"Certain as you live," Seth assured, "minus the whiskers."

"Well, if there is no mistake, it's a mighty suspicious thing, his shaving 'em off at this time."

Seth's silence was assent to that, and so they followed on, till finally the man came to an office, where he entered; and among the names by the door was that of Aaron Buckley. It was pretty certain they were on the right track.

CHAPTER VI.

CLARK PUT ON HIS GUARD.

"SILENT SETH, we're sadly stumped," remarked Happy Harry, in anything but a happy tone, as the two lads stopped and stared at the door which had just swallowed the object of their suspicions.

"I guess you are right, so far as hearing what they have to say," Seth came to the same conclusion. "But, we have got our focus on him just the same, and maybe we'll get the bulge on him before we get through. All of which I say to save wear and tear of your talker."

This was only an occasional.

Seth did not often let himself loose, even privately to Harry.

There was nothing for the pards to do but wait, since they could devise no plan by which to learn what was said within.

So, taking up their station on the other side of the street they fell to talking quietly about the case and the new turn it had taken, while they kept watch for their suspect.

Meantime the man had gone into an office where several gentlemen were assembled, two of whom we have seen before.

These were Aaron Buckley and John Edwards.

All looked at the new-comer in something of surprise, and Mr. Buckley put their surprise into words.

"Great Scott! Clark, what's happened to you?" he demanded.

The new-comer smiled. He was a man who looked to be forty years of age, and his clean-shaved face had the whitish blue appearance peculiar to a person who had just removed a heavy dark beard.

"I expect I do look strange," he observed, "Had to sacrifice my hirsute adornment, though. But, what is this you tell me about Pleyton?"

"Why did you have to drop your beard?" Buckley urged, before noticing the question of the other.

"Why, when the storm came up so suddenly last night I sprung to close my window, and like an ass unthinkingly leaned over the lamp to reach it. It was done in a second; the heat cropped a chunk off my chin that robbed me of my beauty and made me paw lively to escape a burning. You see it just singed one eyebrow a little."

He indicated his right brow, which did appear to show evidence of some such mishap.

Buckley looked at Edwards in a peculiar way, a glance that was noticed by none of the others, however, unless it was Clark himself.

We have seen that Harry and Seth had made no mistake.

"And so you had to make a clean sweep of it, did you?" Buckley remarked. "It was rather rough on you, that's a fact. But, about Pleyton, he is dead, as I told you in my message."

"When did he die?"

"Last night."

"What was the matter with him? He was perfectly well when I saw him only yesterday, or looked to be, at any rate."

"He was out in the storm, and was a victim of the lightning."

"Possible! Poor Pleyton, he was a good fellow and I liked him well. This is sad news. But, you spoke about investigating it; what is there to look into? If it is known he was killed by the lightning, isn't that all there is of it?"

"It is our fourth death within two months."

"Yes, so it is."

"And the insurance company may hesitate about paying."

"Couldn't greatly blame them if they did look into it closely; but, we always invite that."

"Yes, and always must, to a man. Of course you know what the suspicion is coming to, if this keeps on. Another death, and there may be trouble."

"I can guess at what you hint."

"You cannot help seeing it. It will be said there is a Judas among us; that one of our number is seeking personal gain by disposing of all the rest as speedily as possible."

"It might be made interesting if any one should make that charge, Mr. Buckley. Let the company make it, and I think there will be music in the air, and maybe some dancing to a lively tune. What do *you* think about it?"

"I should hope we would be able to stand together in our mutual defense."

"And why shouldn't we?"

"No reason, that I know of. But, we have come together to talk the matter over and see what can be done. In the first place, was it possible that one of us could have killed Pleyton?"

"My God! are you not carrying this thing pretty far, Mr. Buckley?"

"No one else has thought so, Mr. Clark."

"Well, I do think so, for one. You would not, I hope, intimate that I may have killed him?"

"Not by any means, sir. We are only taking steps to forestall whatever suspicion the company may bring up. Can we each prove a clear *alibi* in the matter? If not, the company will have a point and we will have to bear a stain."

Clark was pale, and his face had a grim expression.

"It strikes me this is inviting suspicion," he said. "Would it not have been better to wait until some such charge was made before beginning to defend it? All this looks to me like foolish work. And the more so, too, since Pleyton was killed by the storm. What more is asked?"

"There was something peculiar about the manner of his death, though."

"Ha! you did not tell me that; that may make a difference. What is the peculiarity of which you speak?"

"He was killed by an electric-light wire, and there is only a single burn, right at the base of the brain, as though he had been purposely touched with the end of the wire by some one."

"Pshaw! that sounds like romance. Mr. Buckley, I gave you credit for a harder head than this would go to prove you really do possess."

"The insurance company may make a point of this simple fact, nevertheless, and what are we going to say?"

"Say? We'll tell them to go their full length, and then to come down with the money. If they can prove anything against us, well and good, if not, then they must pay."

"And that is *your* plan?"

"It is."

"How would it do for us to give up our friendly scheme, and drop the insurance altogether?"

"Is that *your* plan?"

"I merely ask what you think of it?"

"If the majority of you vote it, I'll agree to it."

"That's not the question. What do you think about it yourself?"

"Well, I think we'd be idiotic asses to let the company bully us into anything of the sort. We have paid our money and the company has assumed the risks, and if we all die to-morrow it is their loss."

"But, it will become tiresome if we have

to fight for every claim, and the more so, if suspicion is going to be pointed at us. It will come to the matter of having detectives dogging our steps, and I for one would not fancy anything of that sort."

"What need we care? We are honest men with honest intentions; let them look upon us for what they please. We can defy them to prove."

"And that is your stand?"

"Yes."

"Then of course you are prepared to prove where *you* were about the time when Pleyton was stricken down."

"Certainly; I was at home in my room. Does not the loss of my beard prove it? I tell you candidly, Mr. Buckley, I do not like these things you are hinting at. You had better desist, I warn you."

There was a dangerous glint in the speaker's eyes.

"The loss of your beard is support for the story you tell, certainly."

"Do you call me a liar?"

"No, my dear sir, not at all; I am merely trying to show how the insurance company may press you, that's all."

"Well, when they begin I'll defend myself, and *that* is all, too. The rest of you look out for your own heads; I'll be on hand to defend mine, every time. You have heaped insult upon me for which I demand apology."

"Which is humbly offered," said Mr. Buckley, promptly.

"And which I hardly know whether to accept or not. It looks as though you had called me here to charge me, almost, with the murder of one of my best friends. Had I dreamed of such a thing, never would I have gone into this scheme with you; but, now that I am in it, I'm in to stay."

"I approve of your decision," spoke up one of the others.

"Thank you, Mr. Whitaker."

"Let me say," spoke Mr. Buckley, "that I have notified the company of the death of Mr. Pleyton, and we await to hear from them. When I do hear, I will communicate with the rest of you."

"I do not anticipate any question regarding this claim," said Clark. "In the storm several men were killed, mostly by these infernal wires, and that Pleyton happened to be one of the number was the work of chance. As likely to have been he as any other man who was out at the time."

"We certainly hope that way," said another, Thomas Pinney.

"And if there is any question, it is their business to prove and not ours to disprove," Clark urged.

And with that he left the office.

Harry and Seth had planned that only one should follow him when he reappeared, and the duty had fallen to Seth, on the toss of a penny.

So, when the man appeared Seth set off after him to play the shadow, while Harry remained behind to learn something more about the office and what business had been done, if possible.

"I'm afraid you were rough on Clark, Buckley," remarked Mr. Whitaker, when the man had gone. "He went off in a huff."

"No rougher on him than the rest of us have been on each other," was the response. "I suppose you noticed he did *not* give us his *alibi*."

"Only because he was angry, I take it. I don't for a moment imagine there is any guilt on his head regarding the deaths we have experienced, and especially this latest."

"I do not say there is; I certainly hope there is no chance for even a suspicion."

There was considerable talk, all around, but at length all had taken leave of the office but Edwards, and he, when the last man had gone, faced around fronting Mr. Buckley, and the two looked at each other intently for some seconds before either spoke.

CHAPTER VII.

GOING IT ALONE.

"WELL, sir, what do *you* think?" demanded Edwards, finally.

"I don't know what to think," was the puzzled reply of the elder man. "I can take it either way."

"For, or against. Well, that's so; and it's a hard thing to hold such a suspicion against any man, now isn't it? If innocent, we do him a terrible wrong. If he is guilty he has the best of it, so far."

"Yes; and, if he is guilty, I see now we have done a foolish thing."

"What is that?"

"We have alarmed him, and that detective will find it all the harder to deal with the case."

"Oh, I don't know about that; Clark can never suspect that *we* have a hired detective, though he will be on the lookout for the insurance men. That may work to Weston's advantage."

"Possibly. The fact that his beard has been shaved off is striking, and the story he tells of the accident to it still more so."

"Something strange about the man, no denying that. It is to our interest to find out what it is."

The door opened just then and Harry entered.

Seeing only two present, and remembering the names and descriptions Broadway Billy had given him and Seth of Buckley and Edwards, he jumped at once to the conclusion that these were the men.

"Have I the honor to address Mr. Buckley, sir?" he asked.

"You have, young man," Buckley assured.

"And Mr. Edwards?"

"Yes."

Edwards looked at him in great surprise, for he certainly had never seen the boy before to his knowledge.

Harry helped himself to a chair, and Buckley also now looked at him in something of wonderment. That he had taken him to be Buckley was all right, as it was his office; but how had he recognized Edwards?

"See here, how do you know me?" the latter demanded.

"Why, you just told me who you are, haven't you?"

"Yes; but how did you *guess* who it was?"

"By your descrip."

"What?"

"By your tally. You fill the bill, you see."

"Who the deuce are you, anyhow?" here demanded Buckley, rather sharply, not accustomed to such talk.

"I'm one of Broadway Billy's ornaments, sir," Harry explained.

"Oh-ho! you are one of that detective's boys, are you?"

"Yes, when the boss is around, sir, I'm a boy."

"And when he isn't?"

"Then I'm boss."

Both men laughed at Harry's little joke, and Buckley then demanded:

"Well, what brings you here?"

"Followed that fellow without the whiskers."

"Ha! that was it, eh? Then your boss has told you all about a certain business matter?"

"The boss and his beagles are one, sir, when there is business on the hooks. We couldn't pull together if it wasn't worked that way."

"I see. Well, what do you want?"

"Want to know what you know, sir, that's all."

"You are a cheeky young customer, anyhow. Explain yourself."

"Well, you sent for this man Clark to come here, and I followed, and now I would

like to know what you made out of it all. Get any points that will help Broadway William in solving the riddle?"

Both men looked at Harry in wonderment undisguised.

"How did you know I sent for the man?" asked Buckley.

"It would be chestnuts if I told you," Harry returned. "That's what detectives scrubs are for, to find out things."

"And that's what you are here for now?"

"Nothing else, sir."

"How did you know the man was Clark, with his beard off?"

"Guessed at that part of it, sir. Do you know *why* he shaved it off? Want to tell the boss."

Mr. Buckley stated the matter briefly and to the point.

Harry was quick to infer what was not put in so many words, and soon had the whole substance of what had taken place.

"Much obliged," he said. "This will be something for the boss to tie to, anyhow. There is a skeleton in the garret here some—and we're going to rattle his bones pretty presently."

Harry rose to go.

"Not so fast, my boy," Buckley detained. "You have got the information you came for; now we want some, too."

"All right, what is it, sir?"

"What proof have we that you are what you claim to be?"

"You were satisfied on that point, or you would not have told me anything I wanted to know."

"Well, maybe you are right; but, what does your boss think about this case? What is his private opinion of the man against whom suspicion seems to point?"

"You might as well ask me to go and question the Sphinx in Africa. You can't read Broadway Billy's thoughts in his eyes any more'n you can eat oyster shells."

"Then you don't know?"

"That's what I'll have to plead, boss."

So Harry was allowed to depart, and Buckley and Edwards looked at each other again.

"Who would have thought that detective could have set the ball rolling so soon?" Edwards observed. "Here they are at it hot and strong already."

"What we have read of that fellow must be true. I'm mighty glad he is working for us instead of against us, anyhow. I hope he'll wind it up in short order, so we can get it out of mind."

Silent Seth, meanwhile, had been sticking close to the suspects.

Clark did not go back to his lodging, but laid his course in the direction of one of the scarce-reputable quarters of the great city.

The man had never a suspicion of being followed, evidently, for he did not once glance around, and Seth had no trouble whatever in keeping him under easy surveillance.

Finally he came to a small park, where he took a seat on one of the benches placed there seemingly to benefit tramps.

Seth held back at a safe distance, and waited for a further move.

The man took a notebook from his pocket and wrote something on one of the leaves which he tore out and folded.

That done he returned the book to his pocket and looked around as if in seeking for some one.

Some urchins were playing not far off, and he called to one of these.

The "Arab" ran forward, and Seth saw the man give the note into his hand, with a piece of money, when with a whoop, the lad started off on a run.

Seth rightly guessed that some one had been sent for, and taking a seat not far away waited for the boy's return, or the coming of

the person whom he had been sent to summon thither.

One thing puzzled the Silent Shadower: how he could overhear anything that might be said when the suspect and the person sent for engaged in conversation, for that they would do so was not to be doubted for a moment. Not likely they would meet for any other purpose.

Here it was broad daylight, and openly in a public breathing-spot of the big city.

For him to get near enough to overhear unseen or unsuspected would be next to impossible; and if he went to the same seat boldly the suspect would probably move away.

He thought hard, and presently the right idea came—at any rate the only one he thought at all promising.

Since the man had made use of one of the Arabs to carry his message, why could not Seth, on his part, engage one of them to play at eavesdropping?

It was worth trying, anyhow.

Picking out the most promising specimen of the lot, Seth finally caught his eye and motioned him to him.

The little fellow, ragged and dirty to an unusual degree, came forward half timidly, but the moment Seth addressed him he had full confidence and proved that he was about as bright as the best of his kind.

"Why don't you black boots or sell papers?" Seth asked, after a remark or two passing.

"Ain't got the cap," the prompt answer.

"How much does it take?"

"Need a halfer, anyhow."

"Fifty cents, eh? Well, how would you like to earn that by just a little work?"

"Bully, you bet! You show me how, and see if I don't do it so quick you will think your dinner's ready before you've had your breakfast."

"Never played detective, did you?"

"Lordy! but wouldn't I *like* to, though! Don't s'pose *you've* ever read 'bout Broadway Billy, have ye?"

Seth allowed himself to smile.

"I guess I have," he assured. "I've spent many a happy hour reading about him and his companions. Maybe *you* are cut out for just such a career as his; who can tell?"

The Arab was his now, heart and mind.

"I'll tell you," Seth explained. "You see that man sitting over there alone. Well, he is waiting for some one, and when the other person comes I want to know what they talk about. I can't get near enough myself, but if you will listen for me I'll pay you well."

"I'll do it, by Jupel!" the urchin cried. "You watch me, and see if I don't do it up fine. I've done them sort o' tricks before, and I'll do it this time if I have to strain a button. You jest keep your eye on me, now, and I'll show ye how it's done. My name is Ticket, and I'm one that goes, every time, you bet!"

CHAPTER VIII.

WHAT SETH'S DEPUTY HEARD.

SILENT SETH looked upon the little Arab with something of admiration as he moved away.

He felt that he had picked out the gems of the lot, for the boy seemed as keen as a razor and as bright as a new dollar.

Skipping away to where he had left his companions, Ticket spoke to the largest boy of the lot, engaging him in conversation for some moments.

Seth understood what this meant as well as though he had been one of the urchins himself. In order to accomplish anything, Ticket had to make sure that the others would not bother him.

Their talk done, the big boy called the whole ragged and dirty crew around him, and addressed them with the air of one in authority.

It was soon done, when with a whoop they started on a race around the breathing spot.

They made all the noise of a band of young wild Indians.

Seth kept his eyes on Ticket, and when the crowd was stampeding past the spot where the suspect sat, the young Arab dropped suddenly and rolled under the seat, where he lay as still as a mouse.

Around went the others, and when they came back to that point Ticket rolled out and joined them.

The man on the bench had suspected nothing, and Ticket waved his hand to Seth, as if to say:

"There, you see how it's done."

After some time a man wandered idly into the Park, a sullen, bulky of a fellow, if his looks rightly bespoke his character.

He seemed to be merely idling around killing time, but he made his way in the direction of where Clark sat, and on reaching the same bench, sat down.

No sooner had he done so than the young Arabs took it into their heads to have another race around, and as they skurried past the place Ticket dropped under the bench.

The others went to the other side of the Park and remained there.

Ticket's little scheme had worked. He was where he could hear all the conspirators might say.

Meantime the new-comer had spoken to Clark immediately on taking his seat on the bench.

"Well, he inquired, 'what's wanted o' me?'"

"Didn't know whether you'd know me or not, with my beard off, Budge."

"I didn't, at first, but when I got up close I knowed et was you. Guess I wouldn't, though, if it hadn't been as you'd sent fer me."

"Does it make a big change in me?"

"Wull, I should smile ef et don't! Yer skin shows sort o' sickly, though."

"That's to be expected; it will wear away in a few days, the wind and sun playing on it."

"What made ye shave off?"

"So as not to be known."

"Ha! that's et, hey?"

"Exactly. I have good reason to desire to escape recognition."

"Then et has turned out jest as ye thought et would, at last. Guess this plan o' yours will work, though."

"Have you seen the man?"

"Yes, but not ter speak to him yet."

"Has he seen you?"

"Not ter know me; I have kept out o' his way."

"I see. Well, the time is about ripe, now, and you had better fall in with him."

"All right. He has sighted ye, then, I take et."

"Yes; but I evaded him and threw him off. You can tell him I am dead, have been dead these two years' or more, and convince him of it."

"But, he'll swear he's seen you."

"All the better; you swear he is mistaken, and the chances are he will give the thing up as useless."

"I'll do et, jest as yon say, pard."

There was something of the dialect of the Wild West about this man, and now one came to think about it, his leathery-looking skin did speak of the plains.

"And you must convince."

"Ef he'll be convinced, don't ye mean?"

"If he won't, them some other measure must be employed. See?"

"Guess I do. But, I'll fix him if I kin, and if I can't, then we'll have ter go fer him."

"That is it. It is his life or mine, you know, if we ever come face to face so that he will have no doubt of my identity."

"And you're sort o' skart that you'd git the w'ust of et."

"Well, yes, I admit it."

"Is that all ye want o' me?"

"Yes; you help me over this point of danger, and I'll pay you well."

"Good enough. But, say, pardner, what sort o' work was you up to last night durin' that big storm we had?"

The sullen-looking fellow eyed the other closely as he put the question.

Clark slightly paled, but steadily returned the stare of the other, and as he did so, demanded:

"What do you mean, Budge?"

"I guess you know well enough what I mean, pard."

"No, I don't; you'll have to speak out. I was not abroad during the storm at all."

The other smiled disdainfully.

"Tell me my eyes are liars, will ye?" he cried. "When I see a thing I know et, pardner; that ain't like takin' somebody else's say-so."

"Well, what did you see?"

"Didn't I see you lay a feller out with one of them 'lectric wires?"

Clark seemed for a second too overcome to respond, but it was only for the passing moment.

"If you did see anything of that kind," he declared, "you are mistaken in the man, for it certainly was not I. Tell me all about it."

The other still smiled as if to say he was not to be imposed upon in that way, and Clark showed something of anger.

"What I tell you is true," he cried. "Still, if you witnessed anything of the kind, Budge, don't for heaven's sake mention it, for it might be the means of getting me into a bad box."

Budge's smile broadened.

"Oh! I won't mention et, pard, o' course. That wouldn't do, ye know. But, I could 'a' swore et was you I seen do ther trick."

"Tell me about it."

"Easy done. Et was when that cyclone struck ther town and knocked things all up on end. Ther wires was down, an' I seen a feller that looked jest like you run an' pick up one of ther strings, an' 'fore I could guess what he was goin' ter do he had done et. He sprung ahind a feller an' clapped ther eend of ther wire to ther back of his neck, an' down he dropped like a hoss-thief when ther funeral party cuts ther rope an' lets him down."

Clark was more than passingly interested.

"What sort of looking man was the one he dropped?" he asked.

Budge described him as well as he could, and the description seemed to be satisfactory, for Clark nodded.

"And you thought it was I?" he asked.

"I could 'a' swore et was," the answer.

"Why didn't you speak to me at the time, then?"

"Then ye own et was you?"

"Not by any means; on the contrary, I swear it was not; but, if you thought it was, why didn't you take me in the act as it were?"

"What, and git into trouble? Not any, pardner. But, I wasn't ther only one what seen et; another feller seen et, too, and he did set out ter ketch ye—I mean ther man, but he got a dose himself that dropped him."

"The man turned on him?"

"No; one of ther wires tetched him an' down he went."

"Well, Budge, you have been witness to a thing that I am likely to get mixed up in, though I swear I am innocent of it. You don't want to see me come to grief on account of it, I'm sure."

"Yer kin bet on that, pard."

"Then you must remember that you were with me in my room last night when the shower came up. See? You were there, and we were not out of the room during the

whole time the storm lasted. You had called to see me about a little matter of business, we being old friends."

"Yes, I understand et," grinning.

"And something more: When the shower came up I sprung suddenly to close a window, and in doing so leaned over my table lamp, when the heat burned a chunk out of my whiskers as neat as you please, and I had to shave off. You can see where it just touched my eyebrows a little."

At this the rough fellow laughed outright, as if greatly amused.

"I remember et, o' course," he declared.

"Wasn't I right thar to see et all? Never seen ye so mad in my life, when ye found ye had ter lose yer pooty b'ard. Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's it, Budge; you are the same old Budge, I see. But, now you believe more strongly than ever the person you saw do that infernal deed was I. By the days of old I swear it was *not*. Can't you believe me?"

"Do ye really mean et?"

"On my word of honor, Budge. The man who was killed was a friend of mine, and I would give something to know who killed him."

"Well I'm blamed! I hardly know whether to believe ye or not. Ef I hadn't seen et with these hyer own eyes of mine, you would have ther bulge on me bad; but as et is—"

"I understand, and can't greatly blame you. Maybe I'll be able to convince you some time. Meanwhile, I am in some danger, and you must not forget the story you are to tell if I have to call on you for proof. Here's a fiver to freshen your memory up a bit."

"All right, pardsey; I'm up to the scratch, you kin jest bet. I'll take ther green, jest fer the sake of old times."

There was further talk, but nothing of great moment, and finally the pair rose to go, when he called Budge discovered Ticket under the bench, and with an oath prodded him with his foot.

Ticket rolled over with a grunt, as though he had been sound asleep, and muttering something about some folks thinking they owned the earth, went off rubbing his eyes in a sleepy fashion, greatly to the amusement of Silent Seth, who was watching the performance.

CHAPTER IX.

BILLY SOMEWHAT PUZZLED.

"I'll have to tell the boss about Ticket, sure," Seth said to himself. "He is as keen as a fox and twice as sly. I don't believe even Harry could have done better, and I'm sure I couldn't."

The young Arab was at the same time walking away from where Seth sat, thus not to draw the attention of the men toward him, which Seth understood and fully appreciated.

In a few minutes the men parted and went from the place, and as soon as they were out of sight Ticket whisked about and skipped over to where Seth was waiting.

"How was that?" he demanded.

"Excellent," Seth complimented.

"Learned all my tricks readin' 'bout Broadway Billy and his chums. But, you want to know what I heard, of course."

"Yes, tell me; and take care you tell me everything, too."

"I'll do that, straight as I can. But, there's a favor I'm going to ask of ye when I git done."

"And what's that?"

"You say I have done well, and if ye say so when I'm done, then I'll tell ye what the favor is. See?"

"All right."

Thereupon the young Arab set about tell-

ing his story, with a fidelity to truth that might astonish the reader could we spare the space to quote it.

"There you have it, as straight as I can give it to ye," he wound up with. "I couldn't 'a' ketched it any better with a funny-graff, and there's no use your makin' a word more about it, for ye've got it all."

Seth himself was amazed.

"I've no intention of asking a single question," he declared. "You must be blessed with a wonderful memory, or else you have been filling my head with a story made up as you went along—"

"No, no; honor bright; it was all fact, straight and true, every single word of it."

"All right. What was the favor?"

"Still think I've done well?"

"Yes, decidedly."

"Then the favor is this: If ye kin, give me that halfer in small money, so I kin candy the boys with some of it and not let 'em know how much I got. See? I couldn't done it if they hadn't helped me."

"I'll do better than that," Seth promised.

"Here is your half-dollar, in one piece, and here's fifteen cents besides."

"Thanks, heap much," the street Arab joyfully cried.

"Now, what is your full name, Ticket?"

"Don't know no other name."

"That is all the name you have?"

"Every bit."

"Where do you live?"

"Right here where ye see me."

"Well, Ticket, I'm going to mention you to the boss, see if I don't."

"I ain't done nothin' to you, have I? What ye want to tell yer boss on me fer? I don't call that no fair, I don't. Who is yer boss, anyhow?"

Ticket was only pretending, of course.

"You know well what I mean," said Seth.

"As to *who* the boss is—I guess I hadn't better tell you that."

"Why not?"

"Might take bad effect on you."

"I'll chance it; I'll be worse off if ye don't tell me, now."

"Well, then, my boss is this very Broadway Billy you have been telling me about, and—"

"Jupety Jupe! You don't mean it!"

"Such is the fact."

"Then who be you?"

"I'm Silent Seth, though I'm afraid you will have the impression that I'm not very silent. I must now be going—"

"Not till I shake hands with you, by Jupe!"

The little Arab caught Seth's hand, shaking it with all his might, at the same time rattling away in a fashion that might have made Happy Harry envious.

Seth talked with him for a few moments, gratifying his boyish heart, and after making arrangements so that Broadway Billy could find the lad if he ever had use for him, took leave.

Seeking first his dinner, he next sought the office.

Happy Harry was there, just finishing a light lunch, and Broadway Billy came a little later.

All sat down to compare notes, and the ground was gone over in detail, all the facts with which the reader is acquainted being brought out. That is to say, as far as they were known.

Seth did not forget, either, to mention Ticket, giving him full credit.

"We won't forget him," said Billy. "He may be of use to us some time, for he can do work neither of you could accomplish. But, now, what do you think of the case as it stands?"

"Christopher Columbia!" cried Happy Harry. "There's only one thing to think about it, after what Seth has found out, and that is, that the man Clark is the game we want to bring down. He's the chap that

killed Pleyton, no way of getting around it. I think we'll get the bulge on him."

"It looks dark enough for him, that's the fact," cried Billy. "What do you think about it, Seth?"

Before the Silent Shadower could express his opinion the door opened.

The person who entered was a well-dressed gentleman of forty, having an easy air and searching eyes.

"Broadway Billy?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," Billy promptly acknowledged.

"My name is Joe Dodley, and I'm an insurance detective."

"Glad to see you. Sit down. Think I can guess what brings you here."

"Guess, then."

"My visit to the office of the — Company this morning."

"You are right. I have come to find out more about that matter, for I am of the opinion you know more than you told."

"That may be, sir, but I told you all I had to tell just the same."

"Then you won't further enlighten me?"

"I can't do it."

"Why?"

"To do so would be to give away points in a case I am working myself. What is more, I am pledged to keep a certain thing secret. The only thing I could do was to call the attention of the company to the peculiar manner of Pleyton's death."

"Would you tell me all, we might work the thing together, Mr. Weston."

"Impossible, Mr. Dodley; no use suggesting it. You have the suspicion; go ahead and work it out."

"Will you answer some questions?"

"Perhaps."

"How came you first to notice the peculiarity about the mark on the body of the man in question?"

"May as well tell you all as to tell you that, sir."

"You suspect some person."

"Maybe."

Dodley saw he would not be able to get any satisfaction out of the younger detective, so gave it up.

"I won't press you further," he said. "I thought maybe you could give me a start that would save me some work, but since you can't, no harm done. I would like to ask just one thing more."

"All right."

"No use, though, unless you will answer."

"And I can't say about that till I have heard what it is, of course. Let me hear it."

"Do you suspect any of these insured men?"

"No use my denying it, as I see; there is reason why they should be suspected, certainly."

"That's not an answer, but it will do. I want to say I think you are mistaken if you do suspect either of them, sir. We have studied them well, and cannot think of any one of them."

"Is that so?"

"It is, decidedly. You might hold suspicion against one of them named Clark, should anything point his way, but you would find him innocent with the rest."

Happy Harry was the only one who had to put the breaks on hard in order not to show his surprise.

"Then," said Billy, "although you are an insurance agent—I mean detective, you hold these men innocent whom the company has set you to look after."

"Can't help it, when we can't hold them guilty."

"Then you are now looking in another direction."

"I am seeking a clue, and thought you might aid me."

"Which I cannot do."

"Sorry we cannot work together, Mr. Weston."

"I would be willing to do so," Billy now assured, "were it not for the pledge I spoke about."

"You have no questions to ask me?"

"None."

Billy would have liked to ask one, at least, but could not do so without revealing the fact that Clark was the object of his suspicion.

He would have asked what had been discovered regarding Clark, that suspicion had been lifted from him.

But, then, that referred to other cases; not to this of Pleyton.

There was some further talk, without either detective gaining anything worth their notice, when Dodley took his leave.

"Shall I shadow him?" asked Happy Harry, quickly.

"What for?" Billy inquired.

"He may have a clue that we want to get hold of."

"It wouldn't be fair," Billy reminded.

"Since we couldn't share with him we won't be mean enough to steal from him, Harry. Besides, he can't have anything like we hold ourselves. He cannot know what I witnessed, you see, and that is the strongest factor in the game from our point of view."

And so it was—it was too strong, as we shall see.

CHAPTER X.

TWO PICTURES SKETCHED.

In a splendidly appointed reception-room a rather magnificent-looking woman was impatiently pacing the floor.

She was handsome, but now a dark look was upon her face and there was something about her that was calculated to inspire fear rather than confidence.

Presently a servant announced a caller by name.

"Show him in here," was the order.

In a few moments a man entered, a tall, fine-looking personage, but with the same objectionable something about him just ascribed to the woman. One would have said at a glance they were two of a kind.

"Well, here at last, are you?" the woman greeted, and none too pleasantly at that.

"As you see," was the answer, in about the same tone. "What's wanted?"

"Did you have a hand in this man's death?"

"What man?"

"Charles Pleyton."

"Decidedly not; never heard of such a person."

"Pshaw! yes you have, too; he was one of the ten, and makes the fourth dead."

"The deuce you say! This is interesting, to say the least. Hadn't heard anything about it."

"It was said he was killed by the lightning, or by one of the deadly wires, last night, and I didn't believe it; but I thought it was bungling work, for you."

"I should say so. When I sting, no trace is left."

"That I know very well."

"Who told you of this death?"

"John Edwards."

"Let me hear all about it."

Forthwith the woman told him about the killing of Pleyton, as it was known to Edwards and as he had told it to her.

"It does look strange, on the face of it," the man agreed, "but it cannot be other than an accident, I think."

"The others do not think so."

"What others?"

"The others who are insured. They have employed a detective."

"Have they grown suspicious, then?"

"Yes, decidedly. Edwards told me in secret. They have engaged the detective called Broadway Billy."

"Ha! I have heard of him; not a sharper detective in New York, even if he is a

young fellow. But, he can never strike the right trail; that's impossible."

"That's what I wanted to see you for, more than anything else. Are you quite sure it is impossible?"

"How do you suppose otherwise? How could he come at it?"

"By beginning the work."

"We can laugh at him. Smart as he is, he is not smart enough for that by any means. All we have to do is to wait till he is done, when we can take up our thread of the scheme again and proceed with it."

"You do not believe in woman's sense of intuition."

"Not a bit, as you know."

"Well, I will not try to force the belief upon you, but I have a feeling of dread that there is trouble just ahead."

"There may be, but it cannot be from anything in this connection. We have been working with too great care to leave any loophole by which danger can enter. No reason to fear."

"All right, if you say so; I will take the risks as long as you dare; but, I intended suggesting that we drop it all and get out while we can."

"Ha, ha, ha! Pauline Barry, can this be you?"

"Yes, it's I; and for once I hesitate."

"You must not—you shall not! The game is too nearly won, now, for us to give it up. There is a big fortune at stake, and after I have spared you for a brief time to be the bride of another, then it will be ours and we'll enjoy it together. I can afford to be generous with my rival, you see."

He laughed lightly, as though it was all a huge joke.

"When a woman has stooped to shame as I have, a little more of it does not make much difference," spoke the woman, bitterly. "But, I have a piece of news for you that may not be so agreeable."

"And what is that?"

"I saw Willett Graves yesterday."

The man slightly paled, in spite of an effort to the contrary.

"Are you sure of this?" he asked.

"As sure of it as I am that I see you now. And it was only by rare good luck that he did not see me."

"Where was he?"

"I met him on Broadway."

"This may mean more than the detective, to us."

"Especially to you; yes, so it may. It will be your death, if he meets you, as you are well aware."

"Yes, or his."

Enough for us; we change the scene.

A tall man of commanding figure sauntered into one of the many resorts on the east side of the great city, where cheap music was the feature.

He had the stamp of the West upon him, wearing as he did a big hat and having his hair long enough to rest upon his shoulders. That he was armed could be inferred, though no weapons were in sight.

Whether he knew it or not, he was being followed.

A sullen sort of fellow entered the place just behind him, and moving around leisurely, presently came up toward the table at which the Westerner had taken his seat.

As he came near, the Westerner saw him and gave a slight start, and as the other was passing him, reached out and caught his arms, bringing him to a stop with a strength of arm to be admired.

He of the sullen face startled and stared, and then exclaimed:

"Willett Graves, as I'm a sinner!"

"Just as great a fact; and, you're the very man I most wanted to fall in with, too. Sit down here, I want to have a talk with you."

He had not let go the arm of the other, but pulled him down to a seat.

"Yes, just the man I wanted to fall in with, Budge Winters," he repeated, now adding the fellow's name. "Maybe you can help me in a little work I have on hand, and if you can the pay will not be small."

"What is et, pard?"

"Can you help me to find Morris Clark?"

"You ar' too late, pard," was the answer. "You ar' too late."

"What do you mean?"

"He's gone over."

"You don't mean to say he's dead?"

"That's et, pard."

"I know you lie, for I saw him yesterday, but he escaped me before I could get at him. I say you lie."

"You're biggest man, pard, so I can't kick, but all ther same et's gospel I'm givin' you. He's been dead these two years or more, an' I know et. Et has been some one that looks like him."

"I know better. Do you understand? I know better!"

"All right, pard; nothin' more to say."

The man of the hard face leaned back as though it made little difference to him whether he was believed or not.

"But, is it so?" the other the next moment demanded.

"That's what I've said, pard," was the answer. "Ef ye don't b'lieve et I can take ye to whar he's planted, though thar's no stone to mark ther spot."

"Mighty little good that will do. Can't you furnish other proof?"

"Don't know as I'm called on to do et."

"See here, Budge Winters, do you swear Morris Clark is dead?"

"I do."

"Then I am cheated out of my revenge. I have been hunting for him, and was sure I had him cornered at last, or nearly so, now only to find it was a shadow. There is no good reason why you should lie to me."

"None a tall, as I see."

"But reason, rather, why you should tell me the truth, seeing that I would reward you liberally."

"Jest so; but, ef ye gev me all ther gold of ther Nancy et wouldn't make no difference, I couldn't fetch ther feller back to life."

"Well, that dream of vengeance must end, then. But what of the other party?"

"Who d'ye mean?"

"I mean Junius Barry."

"Give et up; never seen him sence them days."

"Nor the woman?"

"No, nor her, neither."

"I know they are here in New York, all the same, for I tracked them here, after I got around and could get on their trail."

"And thar's ten million places hyer where they could hide and you'd never find 'em. Et's ther greatest howlin' wilderness I ever got inter in all my life, and that's gospel."

The other laughed.

"You are out of your natural element, here, Budge. But, say, don't you want to help me in my hunt?"

"Fer Barry?"

"Yes."

"I don't mind, ef thar's pay in et. He wasn't no friend o' mine, in the old days."

"Yes, I'll pay you, of course, and if you find him I'll make it worth your while in earnest. Where do you tuck up?"

"I camp over in — street," giving the number.

"All right. I'm at the — Hotel. Don't forget, and you can find me there if you learn anything."

"I hev it, pard."

"Since Clark is dead, as you say, I'll turn all my attention to the other and see if I can't bring him to the ground. I have settled with three of the lot, and only these three remain."

"Two ye mean, secin' that Clark is out of et."

"Yes, two, if you have told me the truth, and I see no reason to doubt you, as I said. Let me once meet that pair, and they'll repent the day they were born. They will find the oath of vengeance of Willett Graves meant something."

They talked on for a time, finally parting.

CHAPTER XI.

DOUBLE SCHEMING—TICKET THERE.

It was Budge Winters who took leave, the other, Willett Graves, remaining seated to finish his beverage and listen longer to the music.

Budge had been gone but a few moments, though, when another man came to the table where Graves sat and dropped upon the chair which Winters had so recently vacated, pushing back his hat in a familiar way.

Willett Graves favored the man with a stare.

This the man returned, coolly, and for a moment neither spoke.

Graves was the first to do so.

"Well, do you know me, stranger?" he demanded. "If you don't now, you certainly will the next time we meet."

"Can't say as I know ye, pard," was the answer, in a quiet tone, "but I know that galoot ye was talkin' with, and I know he's the biggest liar out of the hot place this minute."

Graves faced full around, interested.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

"My handle ar' Pete More, but I uster be called Broncho Pete. I'm out of ther wild and woolly, same as you ar' yourself."

"So I perceive by your talk. But, what about the man I was talking with? I will ask you what his name is, in order to satisfy myself that you really know him, as you declare."

"Know Budge Winters? Wull, I reckon; an' him an' me ain't no friends, either. He is tryin' to switch you on a blind trail, pardner."

This fellow was another of about the same stamp as Budge Winters.

His longer or shorter time in New York had merely served to make a change in the style of his hat and boots. Otherwise he was a type of the Western camp; and not a highly favorable specimen, either.

"How do you know what you assert?" Graves demanded.

"Didn't I hear what ye was talkin' 'bout?"

"You did?"

"Bet yer life on't. I was settin' right behind ye hyer."

"Didn't think we spoke loud enough to be overheard, with the music going most of the time."

"But, ye did, though, and when he told ye Morris Clark was dead he lied, fer I know better. I have seen 'em together in less'n a month."

"Ha! I had my suspicion, earnest as he was about it. Do you know the other parties we talked about?"

"You mean the ones ye called Junius Barry and ther woman?"

"Yes; and, this is proof that you did indeed overhear what was said. Do you know this Barry?"

"No, guess not, unless it was under some other name. You know some folks don't allus have ther same name through life, and some has a good many."

"Yes, I know; but, see here: Could you put me on the track of Clark? Never mind about the other. I have no reason to doubt but Winters will help me get hold of him. What do you say?"

"I don't doubt a bit but I kin, partner."

"And will you do it?"

"Yes."

"Good. Do this, and I'll pay you well for the service. I don't know you, but that

does not make any difference if you can aid me in the work I want to accomplish. As you overheard all I said to Budge, no use my holding back anything."

"And I did. Yas, I'll help ye, pard, and et will do meg ood ter git in a dig at Budge Winters at ther same time."

"Very well, set about it immediately. When you are ready, let me know and I will be on hand. You know where to find me?"

"I heard where ye told Budge."

"All right."

While they talked on, yet another man entered the place, one who looked keenly around as if in search of some one in particular.

Presently his eyes rested upon this Pete More, and his face showed that he recognized the fellow, while a look of surprise was commingled at finding him in conversation with such a man as Graves.

Not that this new-comer knew Graves, but his appearance was striking and greatly in contrast to that of Broncho Pete.

"It must be some personage he knew in the West," the new-comer told himself.

He sat down and waited.

Pete had been glancing around, now and again, as if looking for some one he had expected to meet there, and when next he looked his eyes rested upon his man.

His face showed no recognition, but presently he signaled with his hand, at the same time carrying on his talk with Graves, till at last their chat came to an end and Graves rose to go.

As soon as he was gone Broncho Pete rose and went over to where the new-comer was seated.

This personage was one we have seen before, but whose name we will not reveal just here. He was known to Pete More by another name than his real.

"Who was that you were talking with?" he asked, when Pete sat down.

"He was an old pard I used ter know out West," was the lying answer.

"I thought as much, from his long hair and big hat. Well, I find you are on hand."

"Jest as ye see, Mister Waters. When I got yer word I knowed something was wanted, and I hustled around and got here."

"Well, I have work for you, if you are not afraid."

"I ain't afraid of nothin'."

"We'll see about that before we get done. Do you think you could smuggle a man out West and lose him, if he was drugged so he wouldn't know what he was about?"

"Wull, now, that's tall game, pardner."

"I know it is; but, the pay will be tall, too, as you call it."

"You say you want him lost?"

"Exactly."

"That means so's he wouldn't never find his way back again no more."

"Just what it means, and nothing less. You will know how to manage; I call it losing him."

"I see what ye mean. What would be yer plan?"

"This: You could say he was a friend, or brother, of yours, and you were taking him him home to the West. His actions would go to prove that he was sick, or crazy, or both."

"And you'd really want him taken West?"

"Yes, taken West and lost—lost in the manner I mentioned."

"Et's all right, but et hits me he might be lost nearer to home; don't you think so?"

"I have nothing to say about that; I pay you for taking him and losing him—losing him, you understand. You can arrange the details to your own liking."

"Well, who is the party?"

"A young man whom you could readily pass for a younger brother."

"Et wouldn't make no difference ef he was."

a old one that I could pass fer me dad; I ask who he is."

"If I tell you that, I may scare you off altogether."

"Ha, ha! Broncho Pete ain't so easily skart, pardner. I hev got ter know the game, though, or it's no go."

"Well," in a lower tone, "the party is called Broadway Billy, and he is a noted young detective here in this city. He is in my way."

"Ho! That's ther size of et, hey? Then et's ther police ye want me ter buck er-against."

"No; he has nothing to do with the police; he's a private."

"But, how'll I scoop him?"

"I'll attend to that part of it myself. All I want you to do is to take him off my hands."

"And there's some danger that I may git ther worst of et. I don't like the idea of tackling a detective, that I'll own."

"Pshaw! it's the name that frightens you."

"Do I look skart? What I say is grounded on hoss sense. I hev seen men of that callin', out West, git away with a hull crowd—yas, and a hull camp, too!"

"That was out West; this is here in New York, and the fellow is little more than a boy, anyhow. But, you need not fear; I'll take him for you, and when you come for him you will find him drugged and helpless."

"Ther game won't work ef he's toospruce-lookin'."

"I have thought of that, too; he'll be clad in something of your own style. I am going to leave nothing undone."

"Has he any pards that might take up the trail?"

"He has only a pair of kids, boys in their teens, who know nothing about me or the reason I would want to dispose of him."

"Then there's nothin' ter fear in ther deal. Yas, I'll do et, pard; you git him ready and I'll take et in hand. But, what is ther pay ter be? And I'll have to have money for fare."

No attention was paid to a bootblack, with a brand new kit, who had been performing a "shine" only a few feet distant.

He had now finished his work, but sat down flat on the floor and began to repair one of his brushes with a string, though a close observer would have failed to find anything wrong with it.

"You shall be supplied with funds," was the rejoinder. "Keep around in waiting, so as to be on hand when you are sent for, and it may be to-night. I have already laid the trap."

A few words more, merely repeating the plans and the arrangement, and they parted company.

No sooner had they gone out than the bootblack's brush was tossed into the box, string and all, and the urchin sprung up and flung the box over his shoulder.

"By Jupe!" he said to himself, "but I'm in de swim, sure! My first hour's work at my new biz, and here I am playin' the detective a'ready, same as Broadway Billy did hisself."

He had not paused while thus muttering, but was making for the door and out, nor did he stop, even though a customer tried to detain him.

"Can't do et," he called out. "Got 'portant biz on hand that can't be put off a minute longer." And away he went, leaving the would-be customer staring after him with a false notion as to his haste.

"Yes, mighty 'portant business, no mistake," Ticket said to himself—for he it was, as the reader has recognized. "Broadway Billy is in danger, and there's not a soul knows it but me and the fellers what's after him. If I don't find him and warn him, he's a goner!"

And away the young Arab skurried, in quest of the hero of many a tale that had thrilled his youthful heart, knowing where to find him from the fact that from Silent Seth he had learned the address of the office, which, for obvious reasons, had not been mentioned in any of the stories he had read.

CHAPTER XII.

BROADWAY BILLY TRAPPED.

THE street Arab found the office, and half-timidly entered.

It was considerably later in the day than when we last took leave of the detective trio.

Harry and Seth were there, but Billy was absent, and the boys were awaiting his return before setting out for further work upon the case.

This was in accord with Billy's orders. He had been called out by a person interested in the insurance affair, and thought it possible he might get additional clues upon which to work.

"Crackers an' cheeses!" cried Harry, the moment the door opened and the lad entered, "what's this?"

"Ticket, as I live!" greeted Seth. "This is the chap I was telling you about, Harry. Now what do you think of him?"

"Christopher Columbia! Can't see him for dirt and patches, he's so small. I declare he ain't bigger'n a pint o' peanuts shelled."

Ticket grinned.

"I declare I'm the happiest boy in all New York!" he exclaimed. "Who'd ever thought I'd be here in the office of Broadway Billy, with you two? But, this ain't no time to chin."

"What's up?" asked Seth.

He well knew something had occurred, to bring this lad there.

"There's a wicked plot workin' to steal Broadway Billy, that's what's up," Ticket hastened to inform.

"Christopher Q. Crackers!" cried Harry. "What did I tell ye, Seth? Didn't I say I feared something was wrong, the boss not comin'?"

"What do you know, Ticket?" Seth eagerly demanded.

"Not as much as I'd like to about this, but I'll tell you all I do know. By Jupe, it's awful!"

The Arab was somewhat excited, but Seth soon got him seated and quieted so that he could proceed with what he had to disclose.

"This is important," remarked Seth, when he had heard all. "It shows there is a plot of some sort at work. But, what names did you hear these men call each other?"

"One called one Mister Waters, and t'other called hisself Broncho Pete," the little Arab quickly answered.

"Sounds like one of those bully out-West stories, don't it?" cried Harry.

"We haven't any such name as Waters on our list," observed Seth.

"Not a Waters," Harry promptly agreed.

"Who can it be?"

"What sort o' lookin' fellow was he, Ticket?" Harry inquired.

"Dark sort o' man, smooth face, with big brows and sharp eyes, and had hair black as coal."

Harry and Seth exchanged glances.

"We've seen him," declared Seth, promptly.

"That's what we have; the boss has made a big blunder."

"And a serious one, it may be, unless we can help him out."

"Just what we have got to do. Ticket, you have brought us a big clue, as well as warned us of the boss's danger."

"Glad I'm o' some use to somebody."

"But, tell me, was either of these men one of those you saw this morning in that little Park?" asked Seth.

"Nix."

"They were neither Clark nor Budge Winters, then, Harry. We are right in our suspicion, ten to one. We must be up and doing."

Seth was not one whit excited, but he was thoroughly in earnest. And when Seth was thoroughly in earnest it had its effect upon Harry, promptly! Harry had no mind for nonsense now.

He turned to Ticket.

"Did you hear these men say where they lived?" he asked.

"No; but there's one thing I did forget to tell."

"Spit it out, then, for we want it all."

"This man Broncho Pete was talkin' with another man when I first went into that place, or was just done talkin' with him, and he was a feller in big hat and long hair, just like a reg'lar Bufler Bill. Pete told Waters it was a friend of his'n from out West."

"We'll stow that away. Too bad couldn't know where this Broncho Pete hangs out, now."

"Never mind," said Seth, "we'll try to show Mr. Broncho what a pair of kids can do, as Ticket says he called us."

"That's what he done," Ticket affirmed.

"Christopher Columbia!" Harry supplemented. "A pair of kids, hey? All right; he'll find us tough ones, I'm bettin'. And if the boss gits after him there'll be a whole Wild West Show let loose!"

A plan was speedily arranged.

Ticket had asked to be counted in, and he was.

But, in the mean time, what of Broadway Billy, their chief?

As has been stated, he had been called out by a person interested in the insurance matter.

And he had responded promptly, the demand having been urgent, telling the two beagles to remain till he came back, in an hour at most.

The summons had come from Frederick Pleyton, the brother to the murdered Charles Pleyton, whom Billy had taken into his confidence regarding the tragic scene he had witnessed.

A messenger had brought it in the form of a note, stating that something new and important had developed and requesting Billy's presence at once at a certain house, the address of which was given, of course. Billy suspected nothing crooked in the matter.

He had, however, taken his boys fully into his confidence respecting it, as was his wont.

Pleyton had bade him come to the office of a Dr. Puyler.

So, thither Billy repaired.

When he came to the house he discovered that the doctor's office was so arranged that it opened upon the street.

It was in a corner of the house, and the door had evidently been cut in long after the house had been built, for it looked newer than the rest of the building, and was of different style.

Finding things thus, Billy tried the door without summons, entering at once into an office that had the appearance of being the den of a specialist in some line or other of the kill-or-cure art. The place was not over light, the shades being more than half-way down.

As Billy entered one door, another opened and an elderly man came in from the opposite side of the room.

"You are Dr. Puyler?" Billy interrogated.

"Yes, young gentleman," was the answer.

"What would you?"

"I have been called here by Mr. Frederick Pleyton, for what purpose I do not know."

"Ah! I know him."

"Perhaps you can enlighten me, then."

"I don't know about that, sir. Was he to meet you here?"

"So I inferred, from his note. But, may-

be I was to get information from you. If such is the case, speak out."

"No, he must intend meeting you here himself. Pray sit down and make yourself at home till he comes. Frederick's friends are my friends. Make yourself quite at home."

The man politely indicated a chair as he spoke.

"I will wait a little while," Billy said, as he stepped to the chair. "My time is worth something to me—"

"Ha, ha, ha! You will wait a good while, young man, a good while. Ha, ha!"

No sooner had Billy sat down than certain parts of the chair embraced him with a grip of steel and he was helplessly a prisoner. He could scarcely move hand or foot, so close the embrace.

For once in his career Broadway Billy was completely surprised.

Not a thought of danger had he entertained, as said, and here he had walked into a trap of the neatest kind.

Still, he hardly knew what to make of it. He was all in the dark concerning why Frederick Pleyton had decoyed him in this way. But, then, perhaps it had not been he at all.

"You seem greatly amused, sir," he calmly observed.

"Amused! I am tickled half to death, I assure you, to see how neatly you walked into the parlor of the spider."

"You have nothing to congratulate yourself on, anyhow," Billy rejoined. "I only obeyed a call from one whom I considered worthy of my trust. It was a treacherous trick for any one to play."

"All is fair in love and war."

"No, I'll be hanged if all is. But, I cannot complain, for I have decoyed many a rascal like you to his deserved fate, and I suppose this is a return of compliments. I hope I'll have the pleasure of paying you back in your own coin before the moon changes."

"Talk is very, very cheap, young man."

"Which makes it possible for one to indulge in it freely. But, seeing that you have me in a fix, will you kindly inform me what it means? What do you intend doing with me? This sort of dramatic business is growing a trifle tiresome to me, and if it is your intention to kill me, please have the agony over with as soon as possible. What are you going to do about it?"

The man was looking at Billy, as though he could not understand such coolness as this under the circumstances.

"You have a nerve of steel, young man," he remarked, "and it seems a pity to cheat you out of all the fame you might achieve in your chosen profession, but it has to be done. The questions you have asked me I cannot answer. I will state, however, that the note you received was a decoy altogether, and that Mr. Frederick Pleyton had nothing to do with it."

"You will not say *why* I have been thus entrapped?"

"Cannot oblige you, sir. And now, grit your teeth, for I am about to electrocute you."

In spite of his nerve, Billy felt his face pale slightly, but he did not otherwise exhibit anything of the dread that suddenly seized him, and the doctor-infernal stepped forward to press an electric button.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BEAGLES ON THE SCENT.

WHAT strange thoughts will invade the mind in moments of extreme danger or of highest importance.

As this demon doctor, so to call him, stepped forward to press the electric button, a strange thought came to Broadway Billy, in spite of the great alarm he naturally felt.

"Now, were this a romance or a play," was the thought that entered his mind, "this would be the proper time for the hero

to step in and win his applause by performing the grand rescue act. But, as it is grim reality, I suppose I'll have to grin and bear it. No use squealing."

Thought is more rapid than action. This, and a great deal more, passed in Billy's mind before the man's finger touched the button.

The moment the button was pressed, Billy felt a horrible thrill, and his muscles seemed instantly to be tied up in knots. He was helpless indeed now, even had he not been so before.

"You see it don't kill," the doctor observed. "Were it about four times as strong it might, and I don't know but that would be about the quickest way to dispose of you; but, since I haven't the power, I'll have to make the best of it. Besides, you may be electric proof."

While speaking he had released some of the bonds of the chair, and was otherwise gagging and binding his prisoner.

"The dose you got last night was enough to kill any man, I would have imagined, but yet you pulled through and here you are as good as ever," he continued. "But, you are in a fix this time you are not going to get out of readily, and serves you right, too. It would be a good thing if some more of the meddlers of your calling were similarly disposed of. There you are, now, and I'll shut off the current."

This he did, greatly to Billy's relief, for it was stronger than he could bear and he had felt himself giving out under the terrible shock to which he was being subjected.

When it was turned off his muscles relaxed and he sunk down helpless.

He was conscious of all that took place, however.

And his mind was active.

He believed he had made a discovery, that this was the person who had killed Charles Pleyton. He was versed in electricity, he knew of the accident to him, Billy, on the previous night, and all the evidence went to support the thought.

"There you are, in splendid shape and good condition," the doctor said, with a little laugh. "Come with me, now," taking him up to carry him, showing great strength in so doing, "and I'll put you where you will be perfectly safe from annoyance from visitors for the present."

He carried him into the room at the rear, from which Billy had seen him come out on entering the office.

There he laid him on a lounge, leaving him there and going out and closing the door.

Billy looked around, and saw there was no other door to this room.

These two rooms, he had reason to believe, were cut off entirely from the rest of the house.

And in this he was not mistaken. The doctor owned the house, and had had the office thus arranged so that he could rent the house without in any way interfering with his tenants.

When he went out again to the office proper, closing the door after him, his face wore a smile of exultation or triumph, as though he was congratulating himself upon the success of his bold scheme. And as he sat down he communed with himself half aloud.

"A risky piece of business," he said, "but it will pay. The party certainly means to send him on a long journey—so long that he will never come back again, and if he does not do so I can see to it myself. Witness as I was against him in his crime, he has to trust me, and I have him in my power."

He chuckled in a pleased sort of manner.

"Yes, I have him under my thumb," he went on, "and I'll make him sweat, too. He comes in for a big fortune, but half of it at least shall come to me. He may raise an objection to that arrangement, but he cannot help himself, ha, ha, ha! he cannot help him-

self! He shall come down splendidly, I declare he shall. But, then, I am in it myself—"

The door opened.

A man entered, a dark man with clean shaved face and heavy brows, whose hair was as black as the raven's wing.

"What result, doctor?" he asked.

"The best, the very best," was the response, in low tone.

"Then he came, and you have made him prisoner already? Ha! that is excellent, excellent!"

The new-comer sat down.

"Just as you say, my dear Waters," the doctor assured. "He is ready for you at any time you want him. Or I can make him ready at short notice. I have not given the drug; will not do that until a few minutes before he must go."

"No, of course not; you know best about that. But, I have arranged with a party for his disposal, and will go immediately and let him know the prisoner is here and tell him when to be on hand. I suppose it had better be put off till night, had it not?"

"Yes, decidedly."

"Say at nine o'clock?"

"At nine let it be; a good hour."

"Early enough for our purpose, and not too late to excite suspicion."

"Exactly."

"And what do I owe you, Doctor Puyler?"

"Oh! a trifle, a mere trifle, sir; we'll talk about that when the work has been finished."

"But, you have done your part already."

"No matter, let it wait. Get your hands free first, and then we'll talk about the price. It won't break you, be assured of that."

A few words more and the man called Waters took leave.

"Ha, ha!" the doctor laughed, when he had gone. "It won't break you, oh, no; but it will make you tear your hair, my dark-skinned friend, and don't you forget it—and you are not likely to forget it; ha, ha, ha!"

Now to return to the beagles and their more youthful helper.

A plan of action had been speedily arranged, in which Ticket was to take a part as assistant to Harry.

Seth was to go to the residence of the Pleytons, to play the shadow there, while Harry and Ticket were to go to the house to which Billy had been summoned by the note.

Both Harry and Seth had assumed disguises.

It so happened, in point of time, that Happy Harry and his youthful aide were to draw first blood—so to put it.

Arriving at the house to which Billy had been called, they had just taken a survey of it when the office of Dr. Puyler opened and a dark man with heavy brows appeared.

"Crackers an' cheese!" cried Harry, laying a hand upon the shoulder of his little pard.

"There's the very man, now!"

"That's him," Ticket assured. "That's Waters, the man I heard plannin' with Broncho Pete, as he called hisself. Do you know him?"

"Do I know him? Well, I should choke a cat if I don't! His name isn't Waters any more'n yours is Mud."

"That's what my name is sometimes when I fail to connect fer grub."

Harry laughed. He delighted in Ticket, the short acquaintance he had had with him, for he had something of his own sprightliness.

"We've got to follow him, Ticket," he said, "and I'll see what kind of a spotter you are going to make. We mustn't let him know we are on his track, or that will bust up the whole play."

"I know it," Ticket answered. "I know how Broadway Billy uster do, and I'll try my best."

Allowing their suspect to get a little the start, they set forward upon his track.

It was no trouble for them to follow, for the man did not once turn around.

When finally his destination was reached it was a disreputable den on a street of similar character, and he entered the house without ringing.

"Seems to be at home here, anyhow," remarked Harry.

He and Ticket had chatted all the way along, and were now thoroughly acquainted.

"So be it, if you say so," Ticket declared. "I dare go in there and nose around; they might nab you if you tried it, you're so much bigger."

"We'll both go. Come along with you. Let me do the talking, if there's any to be done, and then you will be able to catch on if you have to do any talking on your own account."

"Me savvy," Ticket fell in with the idea.

So, they pushed open the door and boldly entered the miserable abode of filth and squalor.

The door opened directly upon the street, without any approach whatever, and it showed no fastenings within. It was the meanest of tenements.

When the door swung shut it was so dark they could hardly see, for a moment, and while they stood listening they heard voices on the floor above, and were guided by them.

"What, here a'ready, Mister Waters?" one asked.

Ticket gave Harry a nudge.

"That's him," he whispered.

"Yes, and I want to see you," the other voice responded. "I'll step right in without waiting to be asked."

"That 'ar's perfectly right," the rejoinder.

"Was jest spreadin' meself fer a snooze, and you'll have ter 'scuse—"

At that point the door closed, and the boys heard no more.

The old barracks was full of voices and noises, but these had been heard above all the rest.

Now the other sounds served the good purpose of drowning such slight sounds as Harry and his little partner might make, and taking Ticket by the hand Harry sprung with him up the stairs.

A ray of light had revealed where the room was in which their suspect had found his man, and a moment of listening made them sure. Just in the rear of this was a room the door of which was open but from which no light emanated, and Harry ventured in there.

It proved to be a dark room and one which had no tenant, and here the voices in the other room could be heard.

"Jest the cheese," whispered Harry. "We'll hear what they have to say, or bu'st a-strainin'."

CHAPTER XIV.

SETH AND HARRY'S SCOOP.

TICKET, the Arab, was in his glory, now.

No earthly pleasure could have given him more real joy than he now experienced working with Happy Harry.

That Broadway Billy, of whose adventures he had read time and again, was in trouble, and that he was to be the means of getting him out again, perhaps, was quite enough.

Harry drew him along to the wall, where, in a moment, they found a closet, and in that the wall between the two apartments was broken.

Not only could they hear, but could see as well, and Happy Harry rejoiced.

"Yes, sir, he is already a prisoner," they found the dark man saying.

"And then thar's nothin' fer me ter do but ter take him an' start West with him."

"That is all, and you are to lose him so that he will never return; that is the understood condition, you must remember."

"Don't you be afeerd 'bout my rememberin' my part of ther bargain, pard. If you keep yourn I'll take keer o' mine, you bet. Have you got ther stuff with ye?"

"I've got some to pay you on account, enough to apply to fare, you know. I will give you the rest as soon as you come and report done, bringing me the proof that it has been done."

"Proofs? What am I ter bring fer proof?"

"Well, maybe that is asking too much; but, when you come and swear it's all over with him."

"All right; but, now, where is he and what's ther plan?"

"He is at the office of Dr. Puyler," mentioning the address, "and you are to go there at nine to-night and get him."

"How will ther doctor know me?"

"By this sign: You will ask him if the light-

ning has struck, and if he says yes, you will then say you have come for your brother to take him home, and the prisoner will be delivered to you, drugged."

"That's as easy as jumpin' a claim, if you're good at jumpin'," responded Pete. "I'll do et, and I'll do my best not to make a mess of et, either."

"If you do that you may as well have your coffin spoken for."

There was further talk, but of no moment to us, and finally the employer in the dastardly compact took his leave.

Happy Harry and his little pard had reaped a rich harvest of information, few as the remarks and brief as the time spent gathering them, and now Harry whispered:

"Come along, Ticket, we are after the dark fellow still. We know where he'll be at nine to-night. Take care now, getting out."

"You bet."

They waited until they heard their man descending the stairs, and until Pete had closed his door, when they slipped out and passed silently down the street.

Their suspect had gone out just ahead of them, and as they passed out the door they saw him going up the street at a leisurely walk, and no one seeing him would for a moment have suspected the dark scheme he had in mind.

Harry and Ticket kept him in sight, as before, and he led them straight to the Pleyton residence, where he entered.

There Silent Seth was on guard, on the opposite side of the street.

Happy Harry gave him a signal as they passed the house, and Seth followed to the nearest corner, where they came together.

"Where did you get on his trail?" asked Seth.

Briefly yet fully Harry gave the points he had covered in his work.

"Excellent!" cried Seth. "Now we are sure we were not mistaken, and we hold the best hand yet."

"You bet we do! And, it's just as sure that the boss made a big mistake when he took Frederick Pleyton into his confidence regarding what he'd seen."

"Yes, it scores one slip for him; but, then, who would have thought it?"

"Nobody," agreed Harry. "Can't blame the boss."

"Well, we needn't hold the fort here any longer," declared Seth, "seeing that we have sifted this end of the secret; let's go rescue the boss."

"Just the thing I was going to propose," cried Harry. "Come on, and we'll do it somehow, if we have to level that ranch to the ground to get him out. We're three to one."

"Hurry up, then," urged Ticket, greatly excited. "Never was in such a flurry in my life as now."

They set forth immediately, Harry jesting with the Arab on the way, and in due time they were back again to the office of Dr. Puyler.

This was a considerable while after Billy's capture there, as we know, seeing that Harry and Seth had waited for him a long time at the office before Ticket had come to disclose what he had heard.

In fact, it was growing toward the close of the day, and some lights were appearing here and there.

Their plan had been arranged as they came along, and as soon as they arrived they proceeded to carry it out, Ticket having a leading role to play.

Harry and Seth laid hold upon him, and the young Arab became suddenly helpless in their grasp, they having to lift and almost carry him along, and in this way they advanced in haste to the doctor's office.

They did not stop to ring or knock, but Seth tried the door forthwith, and as it was open they pushed right in, carrying their dirty and patched little aide along with them; and the doctor sprung up from a chair where he had been half dozing, with exclamations of anger.

"What means this, you vagabonds?" he cried.

"Are you the doctor?" demanded Harry, hurriedly.

Broadway Billy, in the adjoining room, heard his voice with delight.

"Yes, I'm the doctor," the old rascal snapped.

"What do you want here with that raga-

muffin?"

"Don't stop to ask questions," Harry rattled, "but get out your thingumbobs and doquicks, for this lad has suffered a severe tack of dislocation, and he must be 'tended to double soon!"

Billy, gagged as he was, laughed within himself as he listened. He knew it meant his rescue,

if the beagles were equal to the emergency, and he had every reason to believe they were; while as for the doctor, his face grew livid with rage and he began to storm roundly.

"Do you take this for a tramps' free dispensary?" he demanded. "Out of here with such a specimen as that! Out, I say! Get him to a hospital; I'll have nothing to do with him; wouldn't dirty my hands with him. Get out of here, I tell you; do you mean to defy me? I'll take you by the necks and fling you out if—Wh—What! Do you mean to shoot me?"

"You just keep your shirt on for a minute, while you hear what we have got to say," now spoke Silent Seth, who had drawn a revolver. "We have dropped in on business, and this was only our way of getting your attention. You talk about not dirtying your hands with this boy, but you have dirtied them a great deal worse in another way. We have come here to rescue Broadway Billy, and we mean to have him, so the quicker you trot him out the better for your health."

"What do you mean?" the doctor demanded, as sternly as he could, though he was decidedly pale. "Are you escaped lunatics? I know not what you are talking about. Put away that thing, boy; it may go off and do some harm."

"Bet your life it will, if you don't toe chalk," declared Harry. "We want to know what you have done with our boss, Billy Weston."

"Let me pass out that door," the doctor ordered. "I'll have a policeman here in less than a minute."

"Want a policeman?" cried Harry. "Here, Ticket, you go get him one."

"All right; I'll bring him one, you bet!"

The young Arab sprung to obey, but the rascally doctor called to him to stop a moment, first.

"Tell me what this means, anyhow," he demanded. "You must certainly have got into the wrong place, my boys. I know nothing about what you say."

"That don't work," said Seth, grimly. "We know what we assert—that you are holding Detective Weston here a prisoner, and we mean to have him. If you don't show him up we'll arrest you."

"Wh—what! You'll arrest me—you, two boys?"

"Yes, and we'll do it quick, too, if you don't come to time," Harry warned. "We know what we are about, and we'll make it hot for you. We have got onto that nice little plot between you and your dear friend Waters—as you call him, and we're going to nip it in the bud or bu'st."

"Savvy?" chipped in the delighted little street Arab.

The old rascal paled more than ever, and tried to get away from the weapon Seth still pointed at him.

"There is a mistake, a mistake," he gasped. "Surely, you have come to the wrong place, for I am innocent of any knowledge of what you charge—"

He was interrupted by a great pounding somewhere upon one of the walls.

"What do you call that?" cried Happy Harry, happy indeed. "Hello, boss!" he shouted. "Is that you?"

The pounding was repeated, with more force than ever, and it answered the question. It was indeed Broadway Billy, in the next room!

"We knew you for the liar you are, sir, before we came here," spoke Silent Seth, sternly. "Sit down there in that chair, and don't you dare to move, or you will assuredly get hurt."

"But, my dear young gentleman, don't you know—"

"There is no but about it," Seth broke in. "You sit down there, as I order you to do, or take the consequence."

"And I'll give you another dose of consequence besides," added Harry, also displaying a weapon. "We don't often draw pistols, but when we have to we mean biz, you bet!"

"Well, I'll sit down, seeing the danger of such weapons in the hands of boys, but you shall pay dearly for this, you shall pay dearly, I warn you!"

He stepped to the chair and sat down, and Seth advanced to within a yard of him, aiming his revolver at his nose.

"Now, Harry," he directed, "you scout around and find the boss while I hold him."

Which Harry was glad enough to undertake to accomplish.

The old rascal now trembled.

Harry had already taken a careful survey of the den, and now sprung to the door in the rear wall, where he entered.

There on the lounge lay Broadway Billy,

bound and gagged in the manner we have seen, and it did not take long for his faithful young ally to release him and get him upon his feet.

"Christopher Columbia!" the delighted Harry exclaimed. "You was in a consarned diffikilty, boss, sure enough, but you are out again and on your pins, and now if we don't more than make music in the air I'll give it up. We have got hold of the big end of the mystery, now, and the old codger out here is our prisoner!"

CHAPTER XV.

BILLY GETS THE BULGE.

BROADWAY BILLY quickly shook himself together, so to say, while Happy Harry rapidly reeled off to him the points that had been unearthed by himself and Seth, in the past hour.

"I made a mistake, that is plain, now," Billy admitted. "But, who would have thought of such a thing? I would do the same thing over again, under the same circumstances, no doubt of it. It was one of those cases a fellow can't guard against in any way."

Having all the information Harry could give, he went with him into the outer room, where Seth still had the old doctor cornered.

"Well, you old rat," Billy greeted, "what do you think about it now?"

"There is only one thing. I can do, now," the doctor humbly said.

"And what is that? From my point of view I don't see that you can do anything whatever. My boys have got the bulge on you in the neatest sort of way."

"I know, I am as helpless in your power now as you were in mine, a short time ago; but, I hold information, and nothing can draw it out of me if I want to keep it to myself."

"We'll see about that."

"You can't make a horse drink, you know."

"Well, you won't be required to say much," and Billy snapped handcuffs upon his wrists. "I know about all you could tell me anyhow."

"Don't be too sure about that, young man, don't be too sure. As a witness for you I might be able to help your case wonderfully. I'm ready to turn State's evidence."

"Guess you're not wanted," Billy coolly put him off. "I know all about your scheme with Frederick Pleyton, now, and I won't have to look far for the man who killed Charles Pleyton with the electric wire. You have a good knowledge of electricity, as I have reason to know."

"You don't think I'm the man, do you?"

"You may have the chance to prove you are not, sir. How do you think you'll rest in the Tombs to-night?"

The old rascal, as pale as death already, shivered at the prospect.

"Don't lay that crime to me!" he beseeched. "It was Frederick himself who killed his brother! There was a big insurance on his life, which Charles was going to allow to lapse in a few weeks, and Frederick was determined to have it. Besides, there was other property at stake."

Billy was now eagerly interested, at this new line of evidence, but would not allow it to be seen how much interested he really was.

"All of which you may think is news to me," he said carelessly. "I don't see any way for you to get out of the net you are in, my dear, innocent doctor! Besides, there is more insurance business than this of Charles Pleyton that I am looking after. You are too innocent to know anything more, in the same line, of course."

This was only a feeling thrust, for Billy had little thought that the insurance of the ten had anything to do with the old rascal.

The old man looked at him with dilating eyes. "In the name of wonders," he gasped, "is there anything you don't know?"

"Plenty of things!" Billy answered. "For instance, I don't know how three men were so quietly disposed of all within the short space of two months; do you? Don't attempt to lie to me, now."

His eyes were fastened upon those of the old rascal.

Billy had even yet little thought that his remarks would strike home, yet he had been quick to note the hunted look in the man's eyes at the mention of further insurance.

"Wh—what do you mean?" the old fellow demanded.

"You had better make a clean showing of it all," Billy warned. "We have the chain around you so you cannot possibly shake it off. If you can clear yourself, you had better do so. You know well enough what I am getting at. What have you to say for yourself?"

"Do you mean to say you know about that insurance business—"

"Haven't I shown you proof of it already?"

Billy could now be sure the old doctor had been up to further rascality, even if it was not in the matter of the clique of ten, and he was determined to know.

As for the boys, they waited with bated breath to see what the outcome of the encounter would be.

"Will you allow me to turn State's evidence?" asked the trembling prisoner.

"Yes, if that will do you any good, or you have anything worth revealing, that I don't already know. I don't promise you whether it will be taken, however, by the court."

"Then hear what I have to say, and quick. I expect a caller here at any moment. You may hide and listen to what is said, and that will prove to you whether I will be of use or not."

"Who is your visitor to be?"

"I know him as Junius Barry. But, make haste to decide, for he is late now and may come at any moment."

"You want your hands freed, of course," said Billy, "and the moment we have freed them you will apply some of your devilish electricity or else take your own life, and there will be an end of it."

"Oh, no; I swear to you I'm in earnest; I am trapped, and my only chance is in serving against the rest of the rascals. I'll do it, to save my own skin, for I am no fool. No chance for me to do what you suggest, for you can stand just behind that corner curtain there and shoot me if you find me false."

"I think we'll await the coming of this party, just as we are," Billy answered. "I can make a prisoner of him—"

"And won't know why. No, no, that will not serve you. Let me tell you something more: this man is the true murderer of Smith, Ditmer and Diamond. You see, I know to what insurance you referred."

Billy had no longer a doubt. The thing was playing into his hands, and it was certain the old doctor meant to deal honestly in the matter of turning State's evidence.

Billy did not see how it would greatly clear the doctor's own skirts, but that was nothing to him. If he could come to the truth of the mystery, that was all he cared for.

"I'll risk it," he decided; "but woe to you if you attempt to fool me. A bullet can find you quicker than you can say Boo!"

"Hasten, then! Let the boys step into the back room and you go behind the curtain."

Taking first the precaution to examine the space behind the curtain, Billy at last agreed to the proposition and took off the handcuffs. Then, with a revolver displayed in hand, he stepped to the curtain.

It was not a moment too soon, for the door was opened, and into the room stepped Junius Barry!

"I'm a little late, I find," he said, closing the door.

"Yes, a little, but that does not matter; I have been asleep and your opening the door wakened me."

"I suppose you wonder what I wanted to see you for, since I said it was highly important. I put it that way to make sure of finding you in."

"Well, yes, I was eager to know what is up. Something to alter your plans? I hope it is nothing serious. But, sit down and tell me all about it, and maybe I can be of use to you."

The old doctor's eyes turned to the curtain where Billy was, and he thought he saw the tube of that deadly revolver pressing against the curtain from behind.

The new-comer sat down, saying:

"We have got to slack off for awhile, for another death has just occurred and the insurance people are up and in arms, or will be. Have you heard about it? Charles Pleyton was killed last night!"

"You have been working too fast, man, too fast—"

"Sh! It was not done by me, but it's said he was killed by the lightning in the storm last night. The company won't hear to that, however, since the mark on the body is so peculiar and in such a peculiar position. They will contest the claim in the courts."

"Tell me all about it."

And so the man did as far as he knew to tell.

Broadway Billy was gratified to find the doctor really meant to play into the hands of justice.

"Then it will be wise for you to stop for awhile, that is true," the doctor commented.

"Let me see—this makes four, with the three you killed yourself. Now if all had been put out of the way as skillfully as that—"

"Have a care how you talk, Doctor Puyler!"

"Pshaw! no fear, here. We are walled off from all the rest of the house, you know. There was no discovery of foul play where you did the work, friend Barry."

"No, thanks to your skill."

"And the artful lies on your part that won it from me."

"Ha, ha! Well, that was a trick, I admit; told you I was a novelist and asked how persons might be killed and not a trace left."

"That was the scheme you used, and it was successful. I told you how it was to be done, and so easily that it astonished you. You had no idea that your life and the life of every man hung by a thread so slender."

"So slender that a fine needle, in a certain spot, snaps the thread and there is not the slightest mark left to show what has been done. And it was successful, as you by your accursed nosing around discovered. But, you will have to be patient for your reward, now."

"Which I can be. Better to go slow than to be found out. Let the company dispose of this case before you give them another."

"Words of wisdom, my dear doctor."

"But, you surely wanted something more of me than to tell me this?"

"You are a keen old rat, Doctor Puyler. How would you like to turn a thousand dollars, cash?"

"I never object to that, my dear sir. But, it won't be the first time. I have more than once received that sum for a simple electric shock from some poor dupe with plenty of means."

"Which I do not doubt. Doctors of your ilk are the curse of the world, to my way of thinking. But, I am not here as a patient. I want a poison, swift and sure, that will kill one or twenty men. I have an enemy to dispose of, and another plan to put in motion."

"Ha! Let me know something about it, and I may be able to serve you. Since I know so much I may as well know all."

"That is what I thought. Well, the suspicion of this insurance mystery has fallen upon Clark, and I can poison the others all at once, after a little while, and so arrange that the proof will fall upon him. That is to say, I'll kill all but John Edwards, whom I have to use. The enemy I spoke of is another matter altogether, and I need not mention that. What do you think?"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE EXPOSE AND FINIS.

BROADWAY BILLY was thoroughly shocked and disgusted with what he heard.

It would not seem possible that human beings could hold the lives of their fellows so cheaply, but we have the proof of it in the press, every day.

The young detective gripped his revolver tightly, and was eager to pounce upon this truly heartless scoundrel and make him prisoner, and he only waited for the signal from the doctor to do so.

There was no longer doubt that the doctor was to be trusted.

"What do I think?" the doctor repeated.

"I think you are the greatest rascal on the face of the earth, Junius Barry, not even excepting myself. Your scheme for such wholesale crime alarms even me, and I must refuse the request you ask. You cannot get the poison here."

"Very well; then I'll refuse you the promised reward. You have got to see the thing to the end with me, or you are out of it; and you dare not breathe a word, for if you do I'll let out on you, too, and you will be in it up to your neck. You see, you are not quite master of the situation, my dear doctor. You had better reconsider your decision."

"No, for I have washed my hands of the whole business. Officer, come forth and take your prisoner!"

Even before he had ceased speaking, and before the man could recover from his surprise, Broadway Billy stepped from behind the curtain, ordering Barry to put up his hands.

Harry and Seth, with Ticket, were cut almost as soon as Billy—the beagles with weapons in hand, ready for "business." A more thoroughly amazed man than Mr. Junius Barry had never been seen.

He made the motion to reach for a revolver, but, seeing it was useless, had raised his hands instead, as ordered.

"Wh—what means this?" he asked.

"It means that you are my prisoner!" Billy sternly answered. "Seth, put the handcuffs

upon him. Resist, you infamous scoundrel, and I'll shoot you like a dog."

This was said in such a tone that it was not to be doubted.

No sooner was the order given than Seth sprung to obey, and in a trice Barry was handcuffed securely; then the same service was performed for the doctor again.

"Why do you handcuff me?" the latter demanded. "I thought I was to go free to appear for you! Are you not going to keep your word with me?"

"The State will want to be sure of its witness, you know," Billy answered, "and I cannot afford to take the chances of losing you."

Both prisoners secure, Harry put away his pistol and executed a dance there and then, greatly to the delight of Ticket, whom Seth now introduced to Billy;—which was still more to the delight of the street Arab.

Barry pleaded hard for his liberty, offering to pay a round sum in cold cash if Billy would let him go, but he did not know the young prince of detectives as well then as he did later on. Broadway Billy was not to be bought at any price, and so he told the arch-rascal.

The door having been secured, Billy held a consultation with his aides, and presently Harry, Seth and Ticket went out.

They had further work to do, all carefully laid out for them, so there was little chance of failure.

They having gone, the young detective sat down to await the coming of Mr. Broncho Pete.

It was now night, and it being summer the hour of nine was near, so he had not long to wait.

Billy had put on a slight disguise, a beard to give him an aged appearance, and one that could not be detected in the semi-light.

A little after nine there was a summons at the door, and opening it, Billy there found a rough-looking customer, who did not appear quite at ease and who hurriedly inquired:

"Has ther lightnin' struck yet, pard?"

"Yes, sir; step right in," Billy answered, throwing the door open wide.

The fellow obeyed, and closing and securing the door, Billy presented a revolver at his head.

At this the man's face paled, his eyes dilated, his jaw dropped, and he was a picture of distress generally; and before he could recover, Billy had made him secure.

"Yes, the lightning has struck, you bet!" Billy assured. "You came here to take charge of me, Broncho Pete, but I have taken charge of you, instead. I'll put you here in the back room for safe-keeping."

The fellow pleaded as Barry had done, but all in vain.

Billy had put all three of his prisoners in the rear room, taking care that they were doubly safe, and now amused himself by examining the office while he further waited.

After a time others began to arrive, among the first Aaron Buckley and John Edwards. Then came Isaac Whitaker, Francis Myers, and Thomas Pinney, and soon after these also Morris Clark. Billy greeted each one, and to Clark he said especially:

"I began, sir, by thinking you guilty of a crime; I am now ready to prove your innocence to the satisfaction of all."

"For which I shall be duly grateful, sir," was the earnest response.

Buckley plied questions, but Billy answered only a few of them, telling him to wait for the full denouement.

Their presence proved that Harry and Seth were doing their work, and they could well afford to wait a little while, when an *expose* of such import was promised.

The next arrivals were a detective from Headquarters with Frederick Pleyton, a prisoner. Then came Joe Dodley the insurance detective, together with Willett Graves, the Westerner.

Finally came Harry, Seth and Ticket, with Budge Winters, and the only one lacking was the woman, Pauline Barry.

"Where is the woman?" Billy asked of Marry. "Gave us the slip," was the answer. "She scented danger, and skipped, but she sent this letter."

"Too bad, for we wanted them all," Billy observed, as he took the letter. "I suppose we can hunt her out, though, later 'on. I'll now proceed to make known what I have discovered."

"You'll never find her," declared Junius Barry, from his corner.

At sound of his voice Willett Graves leaped forward, with a drawn revolver in hand.

"Hal you dog!" he cried. "I know your voice! Step out here and face me!"

"Hold, sir!" commanded Broadway Billy, stepping in front of him. "Don't do anything that will give the law a hold upon you."

"You are right," Graves, answered, putting the weapon away. "Still, it is hard to resist. He shall not escape, though, nor this man Clark, either, nor Broncho Pete, nor Budge Winters. If the law does not deal with them, I will."

"The law will take care of them, sir. But, before I proceed, suppose you tell your story."

"I'll gladly do it. A few years ago I was happy in my far Western home with my young wife, a fair flower that I had plucked out of a wild camp. This Junius Barry was a road-agent there, and he haunted my ranch in my absence till he won my wife's affection, and with the aid of his men, of whom this Clark was one, he stole her from me, and since that time I have been hunting for him. But, the letter, will you read it so that I may learn where Pauline has gone?"

The man concluded in a choking way, having told his story fully, in few words, and Billy obeyed his request.

Opening the missive he read aloud:

"TO WILLETT GRAVES, TO THE DETECTIVES, AND TO ALL WHO ARE INTERESTED:—

"I have scented the danger, and have made haste to get away. No use your looking for me, for you will not find me. I drop my name and identity forever. To you, Willett, I will say this: I was never the worthy creature you fancied me. Be glad that you were so easily rid of me. To the detectives, this: The murderer you are looking for is Junius Barry, otherwise—Black Hand, the outlaw. PAULINE."

Without a word Willett Graves stepped to the door and passed out into the night, and no one lifted hand or voice to detain him.

His emotion was understood, and he was allowed to go. His cause for revenge had faded like a mist.

This confession from the woman he had loved told the story.

As soon as he was gone Broadway Billy called attention to the other features of the case, which have now already been made known to the reader, in the main.

He showed, and proved, how Frederick Pleyton, disguised in a black beard, had, on the previous night, killed his own brother for the sake of gaining wealth thereby. He had been following Charles with murderous intent, and seeing the opportunity, had seized it.

The proofs were such that the rascal could not deny, so he confessed in full, to clear the others who might be suspected unless he did so confess, but that idea was scorned. When, in the next moment, he swallowed a powerful poison, however, the reason for his confession was understood more fully. He had been prepared to take his life if the worst came.

An effort was made to save his life, the doctor being released that he might do what he could, but it was of no use; the virulent poison soon did its deadly work and the man was soon no more.

Morris Clark then made a confession, telling why he had shaved off his beard. He had discovered that Willett Graves was upon his track, and knowing he meant to kill him, sought to disguise himself by removing his beard, since on the previous day Graves had met and recognized him.

The testimony given by Billy, Harry and Seth, and that forced from Budge Winters and Broncho Pete, was sufficient to cover all the minor points, while the evidence of Doctor Puyler brought the crime home where it belonged. It was shown how the three men, Smith, Ditmer and Diamond, had been killed, but the reason is obvious why this should be withheld here.

"I told you, sir," said Joe Dodley, to Billy, "you would find no one of the ten guilty."

"And I could have sworn, then, that Clark was the man, knowing what I did about the matter, having been a witness to it myself," Billy answered.

The prisoners were disposed of, and eventually met the fate they each deserved.

The rascally doctor did not escape, wholly, for his sentence, though made a great deal lighter on account of his evidence, was still heavy enough.

Great praise was given to Broadway Billy and his able helpers, for the quick work they had made of the case. The remaining members of the clique of ten disbanded immediately.

Edwards had been the one selected as the final victim. As soon as he had married the woman, Pauline Barry, after coming into possession of the wealth, he, too, would have been disposed

of—at any rate, that was the plan the fiend, Barry, was trying to carry out.

Broadway Billy and his team felt proud of their success, too, even though it did bear the blot of a mistake on Billy's part; but, then, that was a mistake he might well be excused for having made.

And there they are, at the old stand, now with the young Arab, Ticket, on call whenever his aid is needed. Broadway Billy knew his worth, and in the ragged urchin saw himself again, as the bootblack bravo of old.

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